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NBA inside STUFF

JANUARY 1998

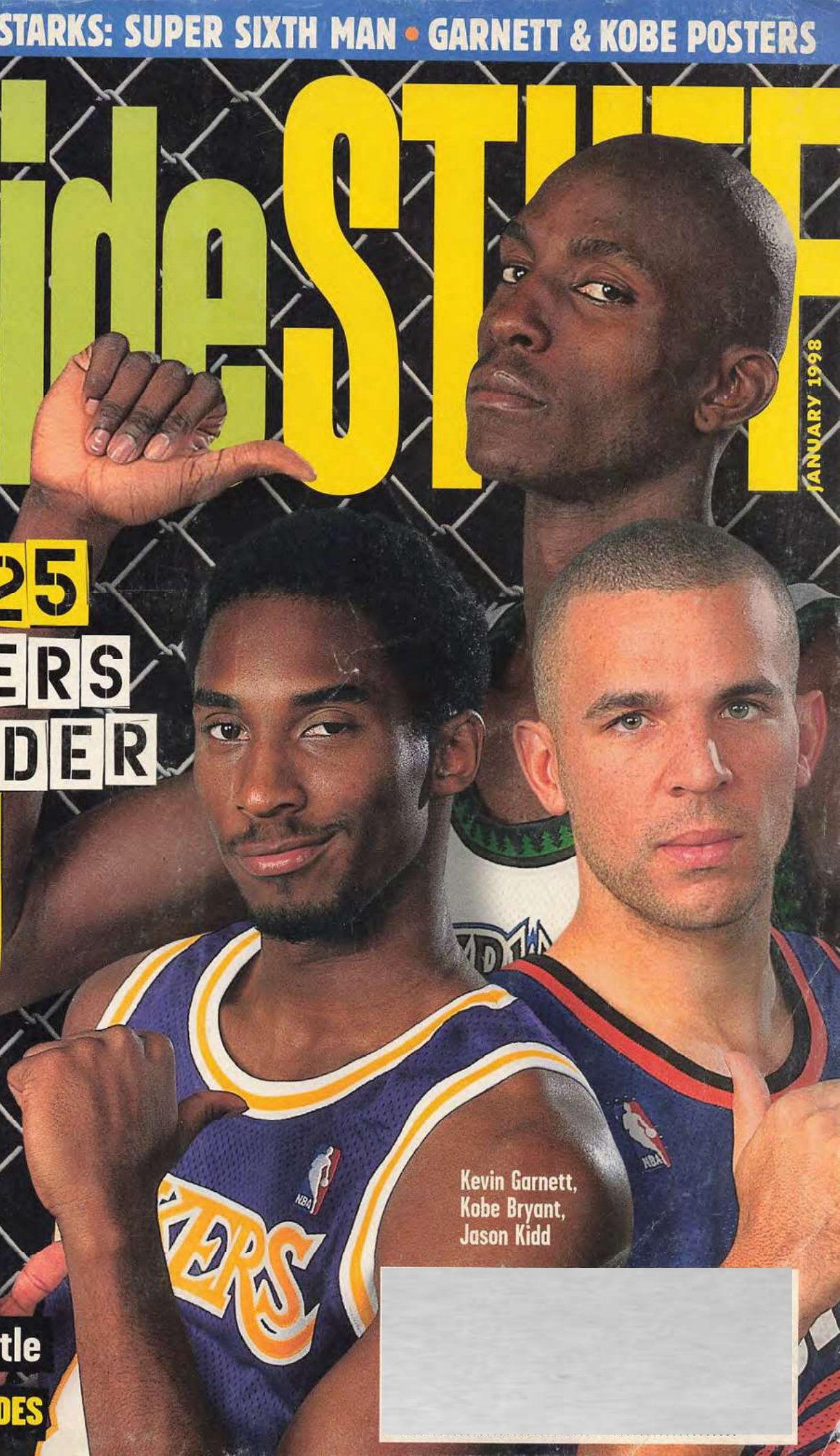
TOP 25 PLAYERS UNDER 25

WHO'S No. 1?

KOBE BRYANT
The Interview

VIN BAKER
Slammin' in Seattle

NBA'S BIGGEST TRADES



Kevin Garnett, Kobe Bryant, Jason Kidd

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But now, I'm not riding for kicks.
I'm riding for gold, in Nagano.
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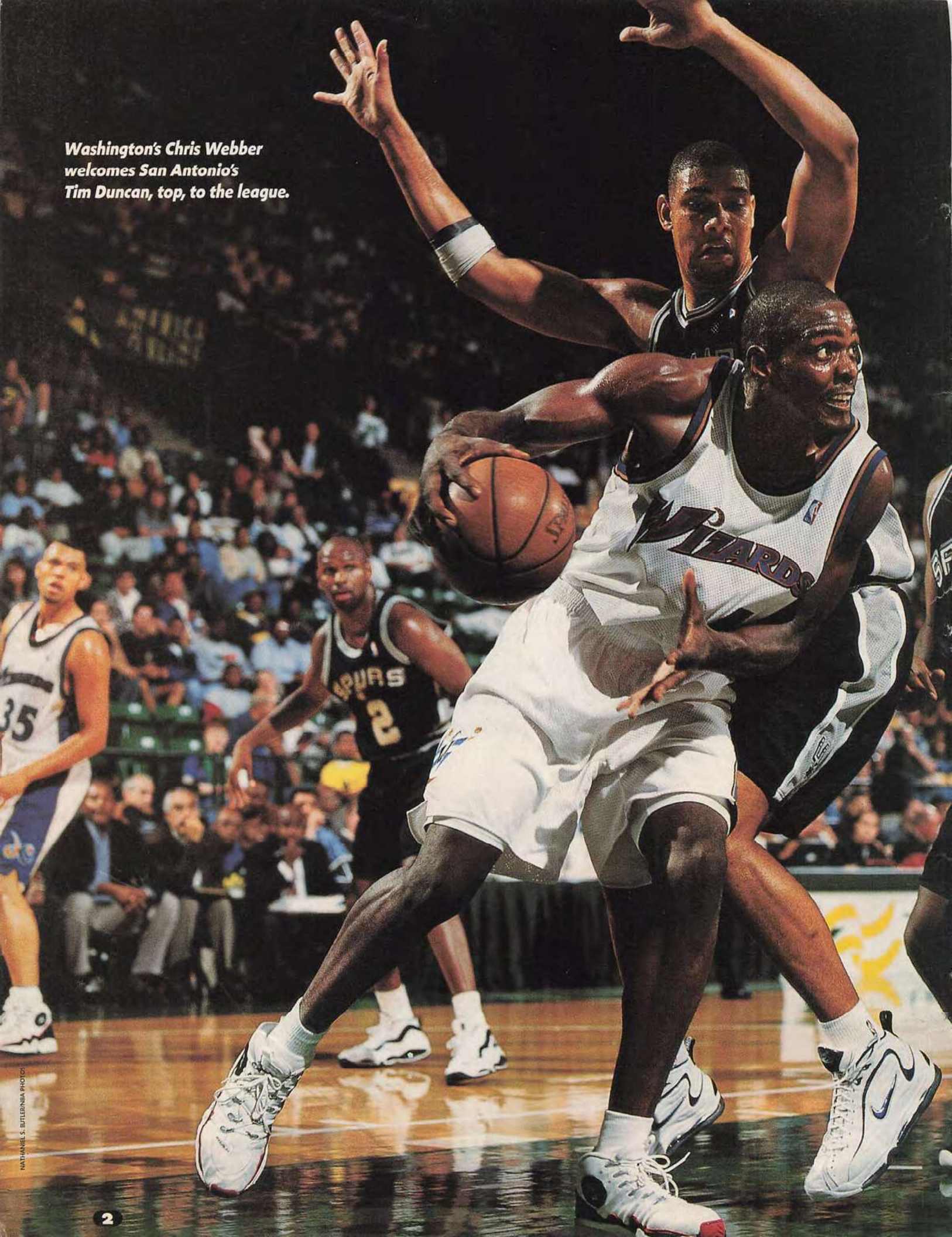


Washington's Chris Webber welcomes San Antonio's Tim Duncan, top, to the league.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

NBA inside STUFF

CONTENTS

January 1998 Vol. 7, No. 1

FEATURES

18 The Top 25 Under 25
Yeah, Michael's No. 1 — for now. We rank the top young ballers who are poised to take over

32 Starting Over
Vin Baker knows replacing Shawn Kemp in Seattle won't be easy, but he wants the challenge

40 Little Big Men
Sir Charles, Zo and Anthony Mason tell how to survive as undersized power players

46 Block Rockin' Deals
Think the Kemp-Baker-Brandon trade was huge? Our inside look at the NBA's biggest deals ever

50 She Da Ma'am
Cynthia Cooper knew she could lead Houston to the WNBA title — even when no one else did

58 Gimme the Ball
Kobe Bryant goes one-on-one with us about his game in this NBA INSIDE STUFF interview

DEPARTMENTS

6 Letters

9 Jump Ball
Stat City ▪ The real meanings of Dennis Rodman's and Allen Iverson's tattoos ▪ NBA first-rounders on the move

17 The Insider
Ahmad Rashad on foul line psych-outs

56 Roots
Mario Elie modeled himself after Sidney Moncrief

64 Rewind
Larry Bird steals a 1987 playoff win

66 Practice Court
Horace Grant on the outlet pass

68 Locker Room
John Starks on making an impact off the bench

70 Scouting Report

73 Ultimate Trivia

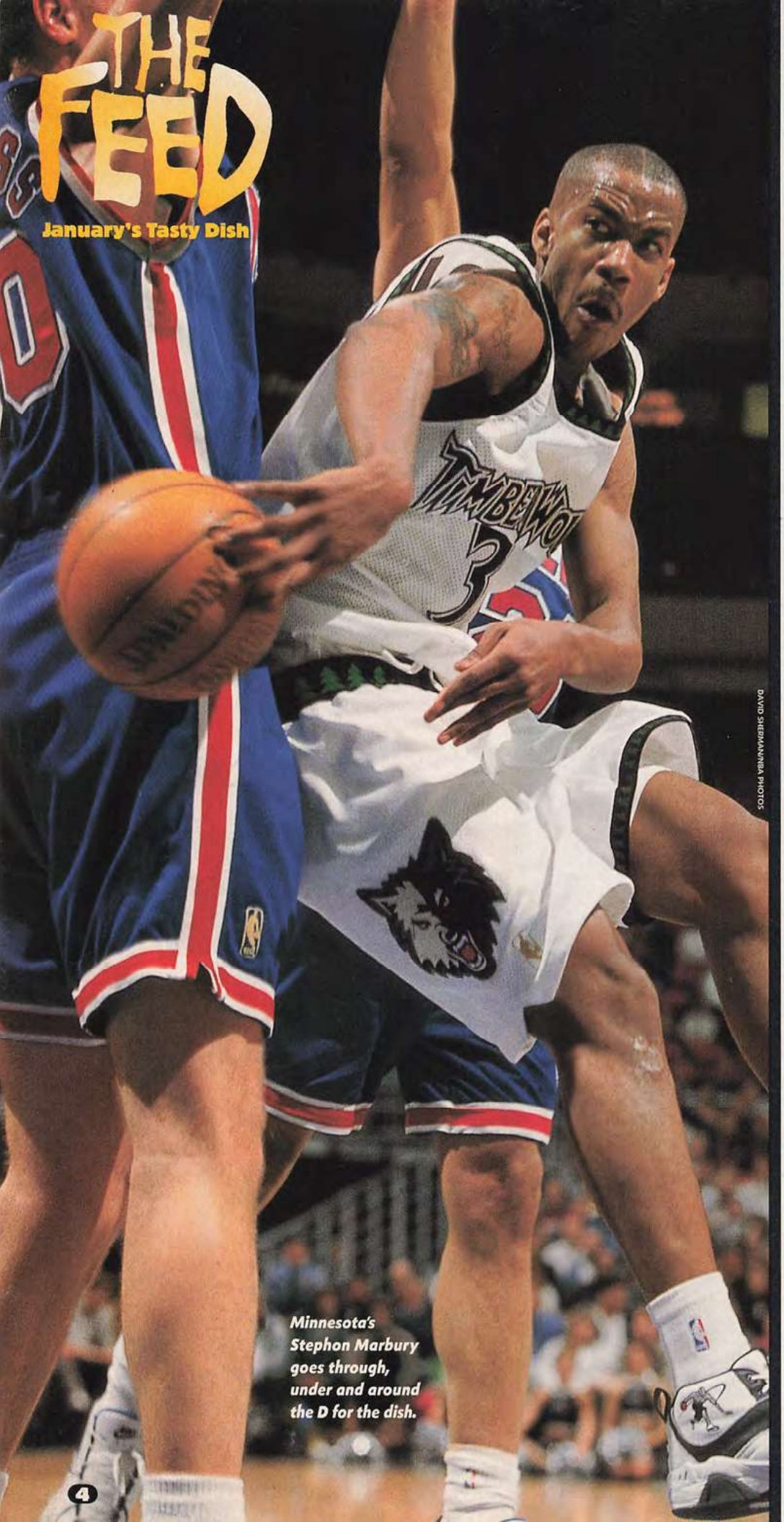
75 Game Notes
Willow Bay catches up with the stars

76 Jam Session

On the cover: *You're staring at the NBA's future, clockwise from top: Kevin Garnett, Jason Kidd and Kobe Bryant. Photos by Barry Gossage/NBA Photos*

THE FEED

January's Tasty Dish



DAVID SHERMAN/NBA PHOTOS

Minnesota's Stephon Marbury goes through, under and around the D for the dish.

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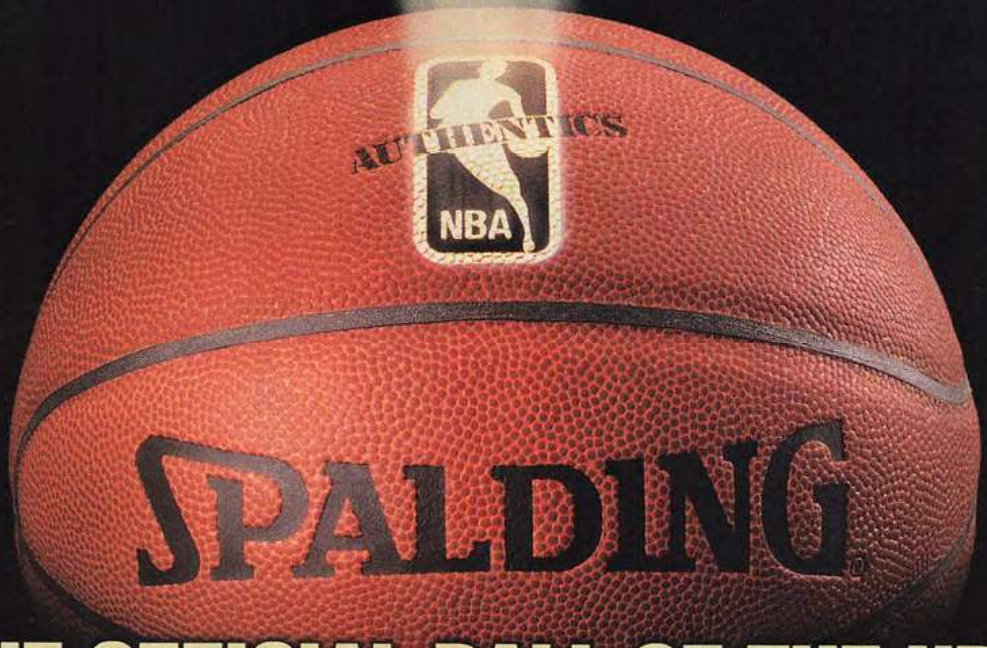

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LETTERS

EVERYONE'S AN EXPERT

Yes, the San Antonio Spurs will improve, but how are they supposed to go from sixth to first in the Midwest Division ("1997-98 NBA Season Preview," November 1997)? I don't believe that Tim Duncan is going to be "Tim *Dunkin'*" like everyone thinks. He may be friends with the Admiral now, but will they still be when they have to take turns scoring in the paint?

BRANDON POTTER
CLEVELAND, OHIO

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

Hardaway tries to outrun Childs.

How could you pick the Pacers, who finished sixth last season, ahead of the Pistons, who had 54 wins? With the addition of Brian Williams, the Pistons will be much better than Larry Bird's Pacers. Also, you picked the Knicks ahead of the Heat and said the Heat overachieved. Excuse me, but Tim Hardaway ran circles around Chris Childs whenever their teams met.

PATRICK MAURO
BURLINGAME, CALIF.

Thanks for your 1997-98 NBA preview, but I disagree with some of the X-Factors you picked. Michael Jordan decides the Central Division, not Brian Williams.

CHRIS MCDONALD
LUTHERVILLE, MD.

Shawn Kemp is the cure for what has ailed Cleveland and its fans. There hasn't been this much anticipation around here since Ron Harper was a Cavalier. It's like the late, great Marvin Gaye once sang, "Let's get it on."

ERNEST BOYKIN JR.
OAKWOOD, OHIO

What's wrong with your writers, picking the 76ers fifth in the Atlantic Division? Did you forget that they now have Jim Jackson, Eric Montross, Tim Thomas and the hardest-working coach in Larry Brown? Also, you write that Allen Iverson plays out of control. I guess you forgot who won Rookie of the Year?

MATT PRZYDZIAL
SHILLINGTON, PA.

Editor's note: Actually, after watching Keith Van Horn play (the Sixers traded him to the Nets), we think Philly will finish below the Nets and Celtics, in seventh.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

Dunkin' Duncan

"AT GUARD, FROM CRANBERR PORTAGE, MANITOBA..."

Thanks for the article on LeClaire Park in Chicago ("Proving Ground," September 1997). I am one of the top players at my high school in Cranberry Portage (I hold school record for points in a game, 32), a I'm trying to take my game to the next le — the sky. I get bored playing against th guys in my school. Most of them shoot a balls and bricks all day. That's why I want t play at LeClaire Park. Maybe someone the can take *me* to school for a change.

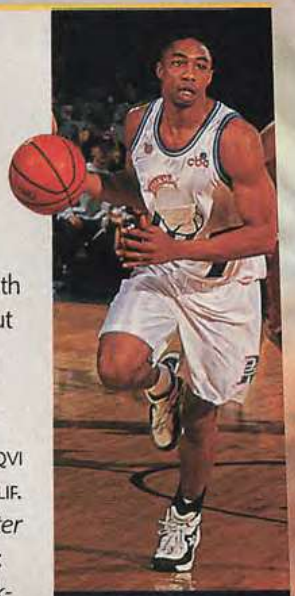
STEVE DUCHA
CORMORANT, MANITOBA, CAN

HOOP DREAM

Kelsey Weems is what basketball should be about ("The Long Shot," September 1997). He's committed, unselfish, and he plays with heart. There are teams out there that need a backup point guard that should give him a chance.

MOHAMMAD NAQVI
ONTARIO, CALIF.

Editor's note: Weems, after recovering from surgery, will rejoin the CBA's Rockford Lightning in January.



Will Weems at last get his shot?

GIRLS AGAINST BOYS

The 2ball matchup that featured the Sacramento Kings' Mitch Richmond and Olden Polynice against the Sacramento Monarchs' Ruthie Bolton-Holifield and Bridgette Gordon ("Showdown," September 1997) was a great idea. So now how about an exhibi tion game between the NBA and the WNBA?

VICENTE FERNANDE
WEST CHICAGO, ILL

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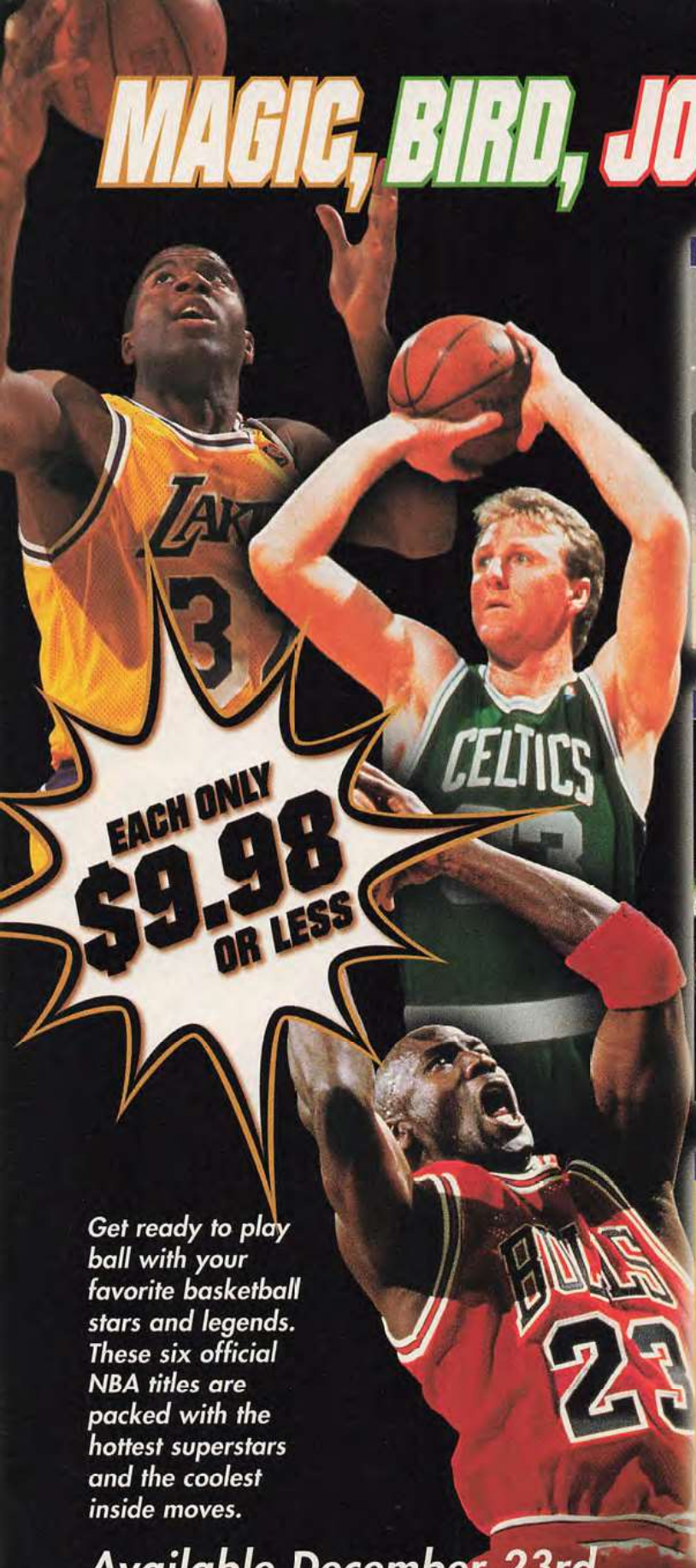

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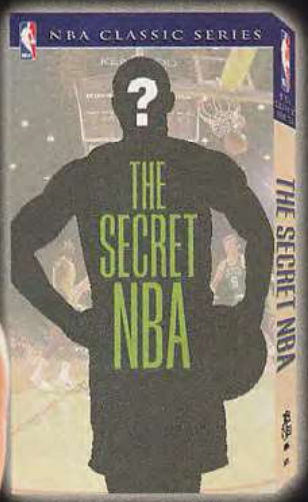

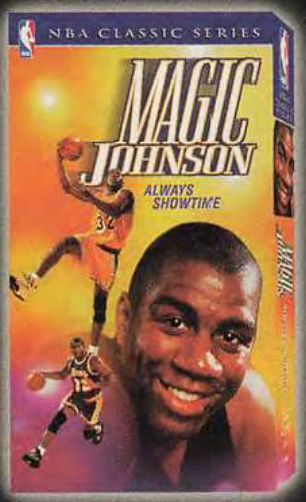

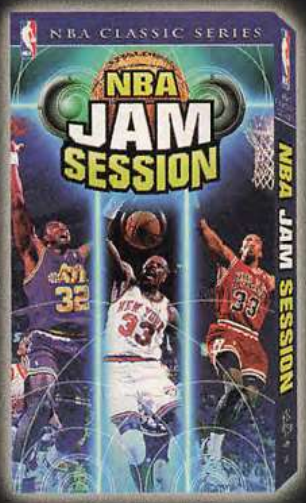

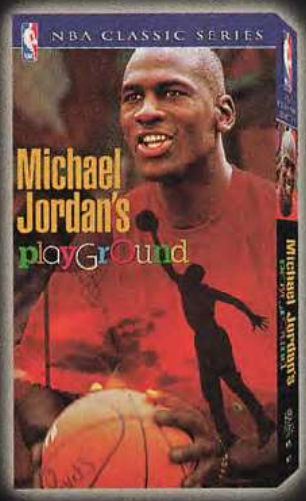

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JUMP BALL

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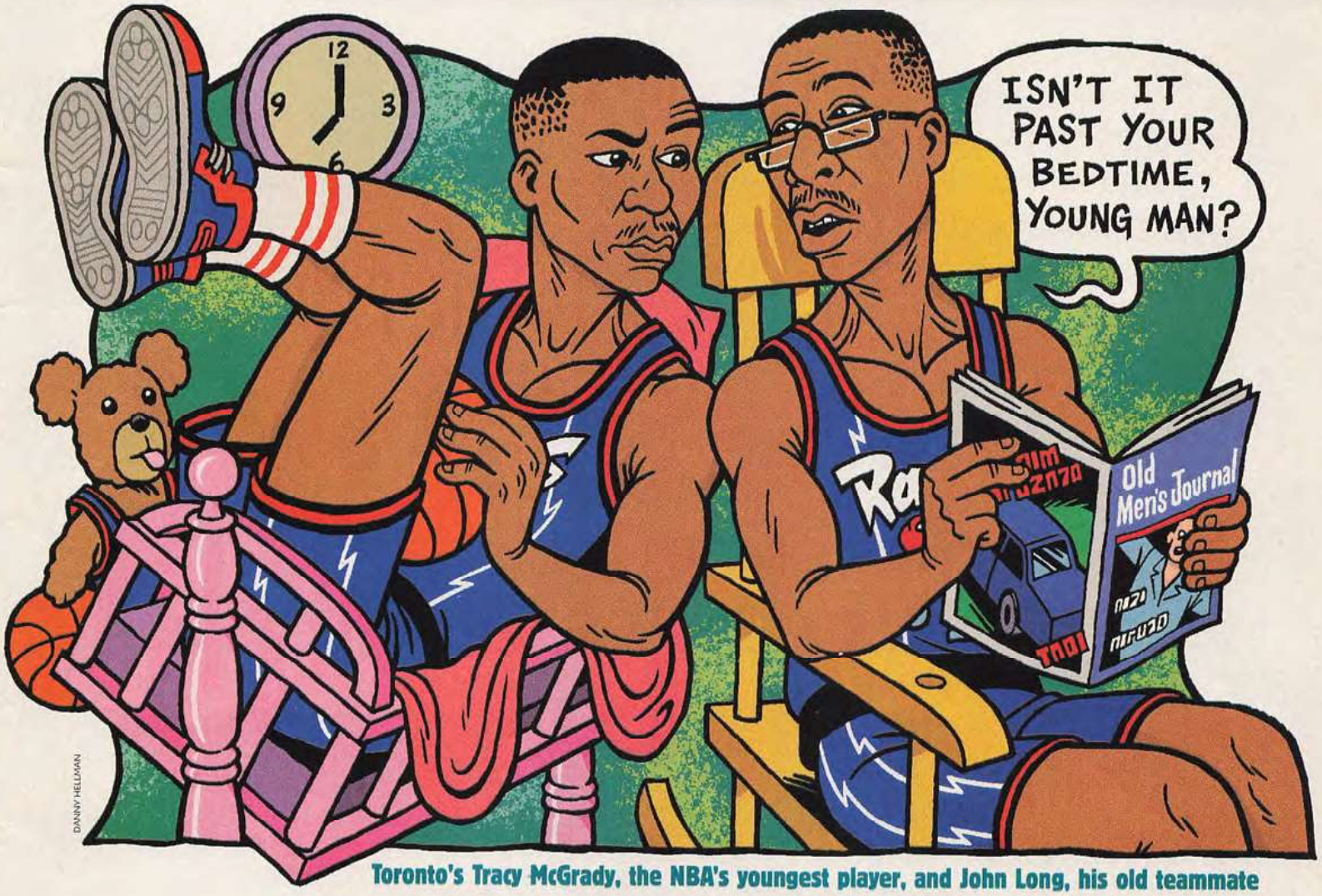
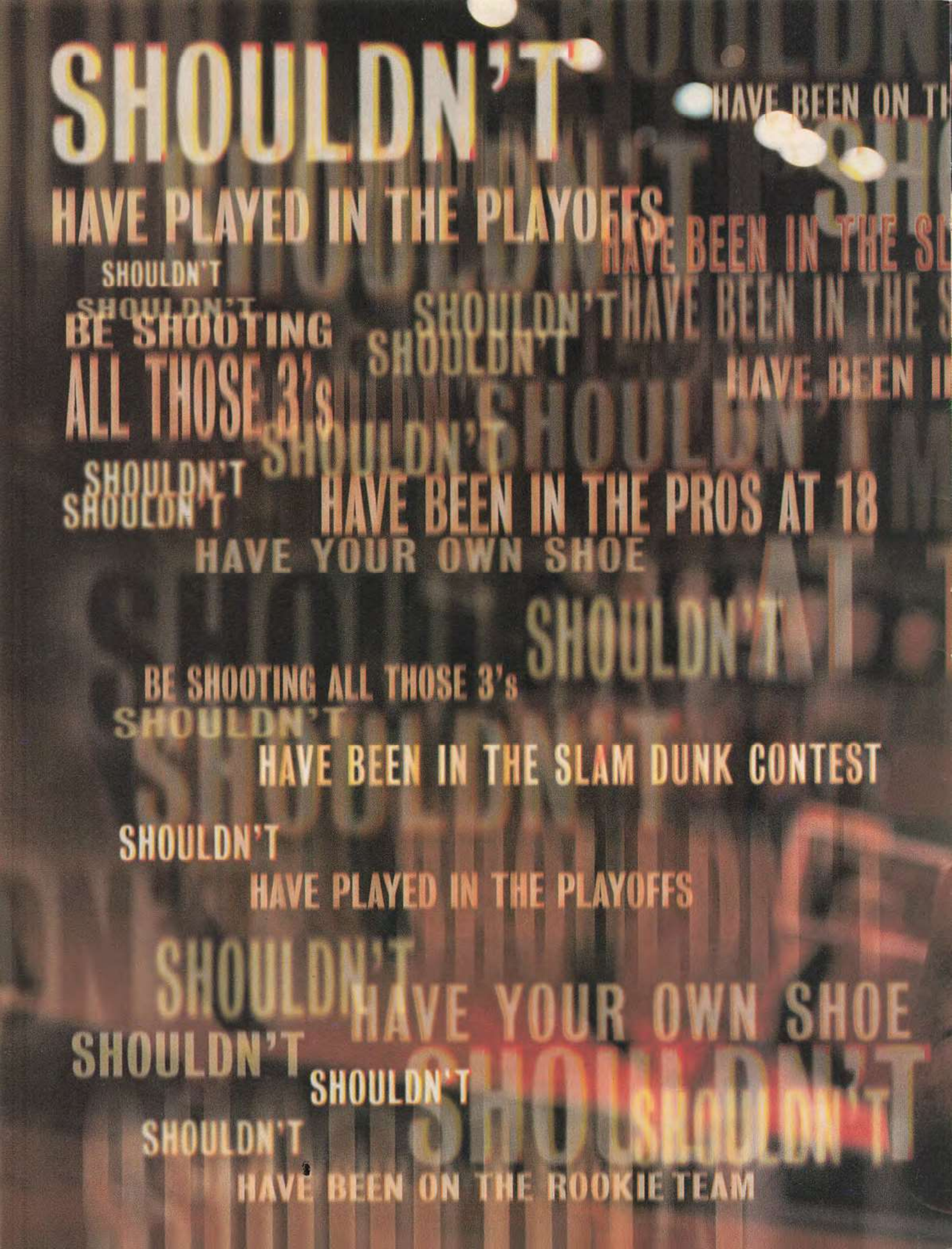


Toronto's Tracy McGrady, the NBA's youngest player, and John Long, his old teammate

- Number of consecutive winning seasons for Utah, the longest current streak in the NBA: **12**
- Number of seasons since the NBA Finals loser returned to the championship round the following season: **9**
- AGE OF TORONTO'S TRACY McGRADY, THE NBA'S YOUNGEST PLAYER: **18**
- Age of Melanise McGrady, Tracy's mother: **36**
- AGE OF McGRADY'S EX-TEAMMATE JOHN LONG, THE NBA'S OLDEST PLAYER UNTIL HE RETIRED IN NOVEMBER: **41**

Stat City

- Number of times Wilt Chamberlain led the league in a major statistical category: **34**
- Number of Dallas Mavericks who have ever led the NBA in a major statistical category: **1**
- Average number of wins for Chicago and losses for Dallas over the last five seasons: **60**
- Number of consecutive seasons Cleveland has held opponents under an average of 90 points per game: **3**
- Number of triple-doubles (of the seven in his career) that Washington's Chris Webber has recorded against Golden State, his former team: **3**
- Number of current NBA players who attended the University of North Carolina, the No. 1 supplier of NBA talent: **14**
- Number of four-point plays converted by Mitch Richmond in 1996-97, an NBA record: **6**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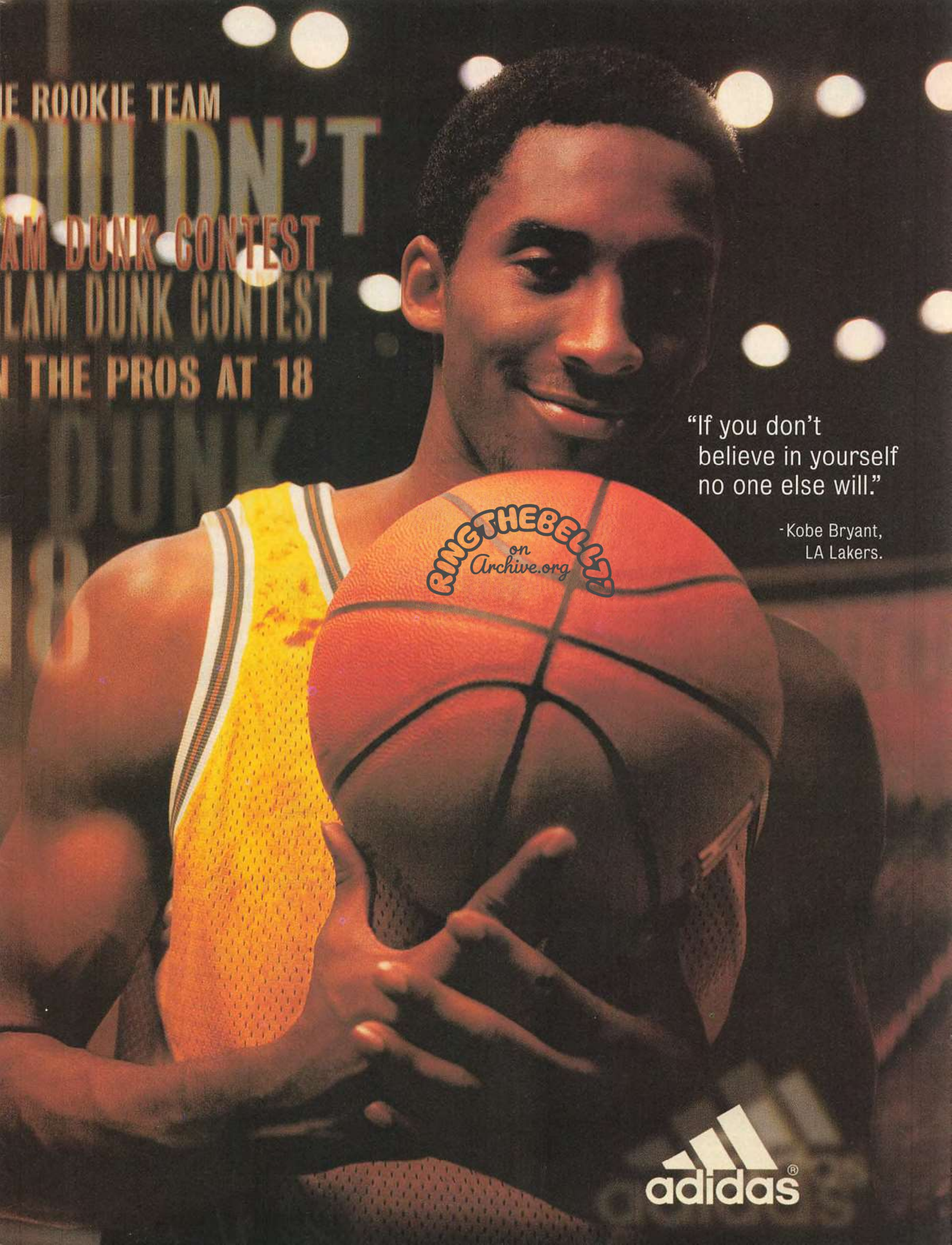
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no one else will."
-Kobe Bryant,
LA Lakers.
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THE POLL ✓

In the November issue of NBA INSIDE STUFF, we asked,
WILL THE EXTENDED THREE-POINT LINE LEAD TO HIGHER- OR LOWER-SCORING GAMES? WHY?

LOWER 55%

The veterans and especially last year's rookie shooting guards were used to the 22-foot line, and it's going to be hard for them to adapt.

— ANDREW CHOW
GREENVILLE, N.C.

HIGHER 45%

It is an obvious fact that a simple layup is more likely to fall than a three-pointer. With the extension, teams will be forced to [go inside and] play the percentages.

— ANDREW M. BLANCO
HILO, HAWAII

next question:

Are you rooting for the Bulls to win a sixth championship? Why or why not?

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the Quote

"Hello, my name is Danny Ferry. Who are you?"

— the Cleveland forward, one of only six Cavs players remaining from last season's roster, on how he introduced himself to his teammates on the first day of training camp.

JERRY WACHTER/NBA PHOTOS

COMING SOON

MANNY MILLAN/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Carr: the new Man

CORY CARR

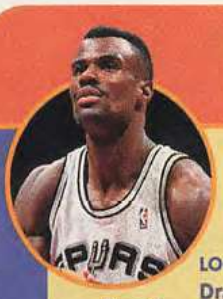
SOME PLAYERS CAN'T DELIVER when called upon to be The Man. Texas Tech senior Cory Carr absolutely can.

Last season, his first as a starter, the 6-foot-4 shooting guard led the Big 12 in scoring at 23.1 points per game. He and junior Tech center Tony Battie were the nation's third-leading scoring duo. Now that Battie, the No. 5 pick in the 1997 NBA Draft, has moved on to the Denver Nuggets, Carr will be Tech's new center — of attention.

Carr was tempted to join Battie in the NBA but withdrew his name shortly before last June's draft. Despite strong penetrating ability and an effective — if unorthodox — shot, Carr decided he wasn't ready for the big time. "[I need to] learn how to read screens," he says. "And I must work on my midrange jumper, my ballhandling and creating off the dribble." But most of all, Carr wants to develop his leadership skills. "I have to make other players on my team better," he says.

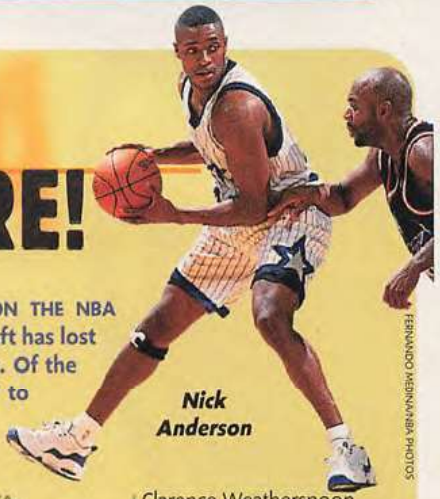
And that's what being The Man is all about. — *JAMAL GREENE*

WE'RE OUTTA HERE!



GLENN JAMES/NBA PHOTOS

David Robinson

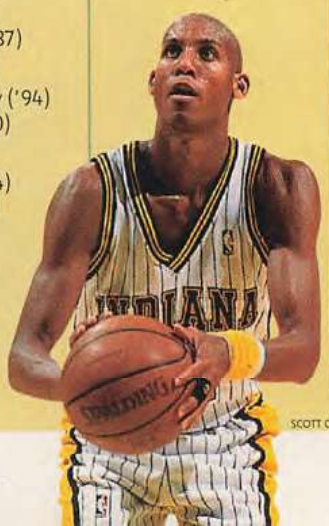


FERNANDO MEDINA/NBA PHOTOS

Nick Anderson

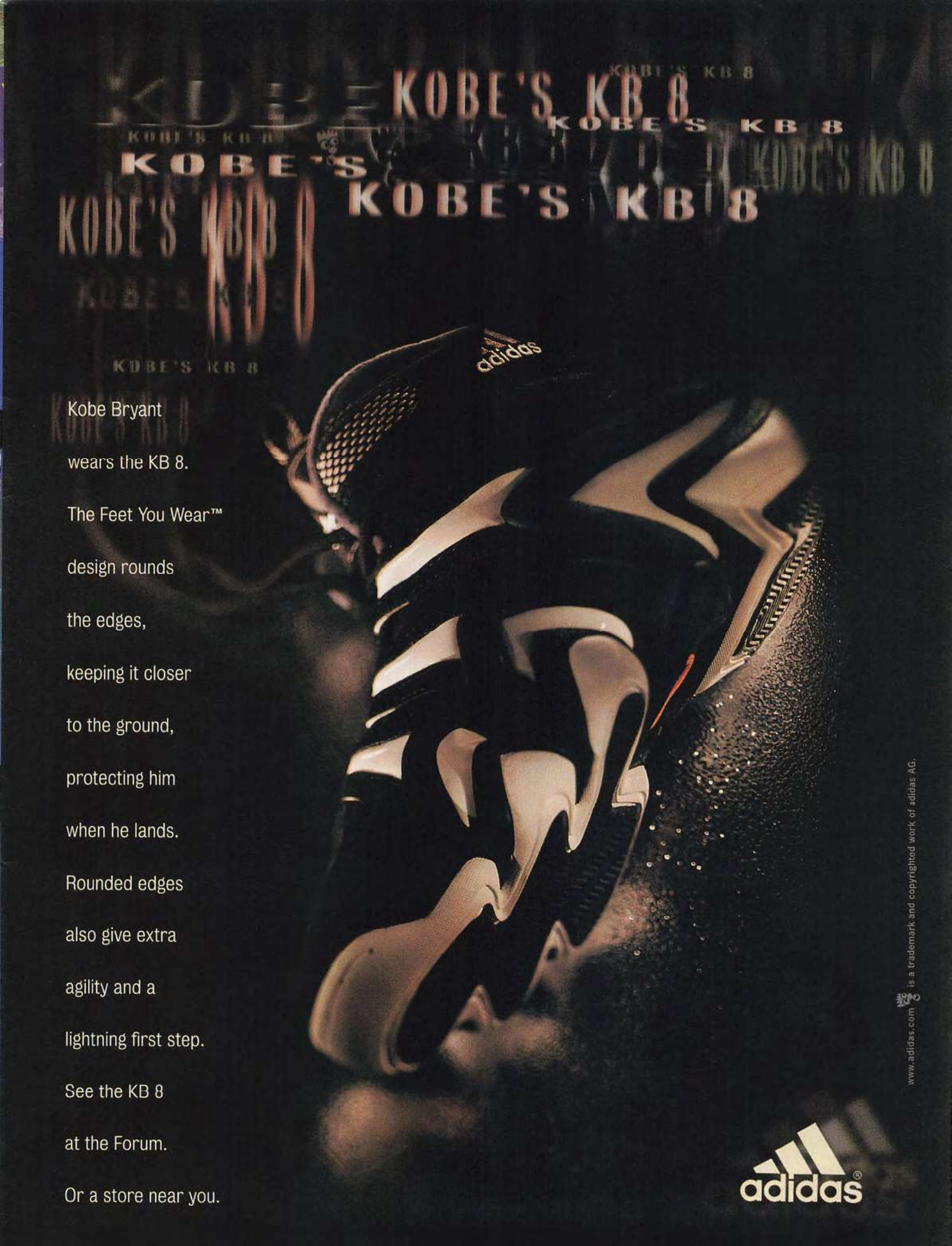
LOOKING TO BUILD A WINNER? DON'T COUNT ON THE NBA Draft. General managers will tell you that the draft has lost much of its value as far as building a team goes. Of the 239 players selected in the first round from 1987 to '95, only 36 (15 percent) remain with their original team. These are the first-rounders who have stayed put.

ATLANTA:
Alan Henderson ('95)
BOSTON:
Dee Brown ('90)
CHARLOTTE: None
CHICAGO:
Jason Caffey ('95)
CLEVELAND:
Bob Sura ('95)
DALLAS: None
DENVER:
LaPhonso Ellis ('92)
Bryant Stith ('92)
DETROIT:
Theo Ratliff ('95)
Grant Hill ('94)
Lindsey Hunter ('93)
GOLDEN STATE:
Joe Smith ('95)
Latrell Sprewell ('92)
HOUSTON: None
INDIANA:
Travis Best ('95)
Dale Davis ('91)
Rik Smits ('88)
Reggie Miller ('87)
L.A. CLIPPERS:
Lamond Murray ('94)
Loy Vaught ('90)
L.A. LAKERS:
Eddie Jones ('94)
Elden Campbell ('90)
MIAMI: None
MILWAUKEE:
Glenn Robinson ('94)
MINNESOTA:
Kevin Garnett ('95)
NEW JERSEY:
Yinka Dare ('94)
NEW YORK:
Charlie Ward ('94)
ORLANDO:
Nick Anderson ('89)
PHILADELPHIA:
Jerry Stackhouse ('95)
Clarence Weatherspoon ('92)
PHOENIX: None
PORTLAND: None
SACRAMENTO:
Corliss Williamson ('95)
Bobby Hurley ('93)
SAN ANTONIO:
Cory Alexander ('95)
David Robinson ('87)
SEATTLE:
Gary Payton ('90)
TORONTO:
Damon Stoudamire ('95)
UTAH:
Greg Ostertag ('95)
VANCOUVER:
Bryant Reeves ('95)
WASHINGTON:
Juwan Howard ('94)
Calbert Cheaney ('93)



SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

Reggie Miller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THIS DATE in NBA HISTORY

5 YEARS AGO

Jan. 8, 1993: In his 620th NBA game, Michael Jordan drops in 35 points to become the second-fastest player to score 20,000 career points. (Wilt Chamberlain did it in 499 games.)

10 YEARS AGO

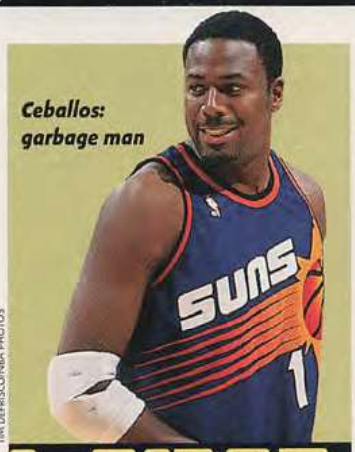
Jan. 29, 1988: The largest crowd in NBA history, 61,983, piles into the Pontiac Silverdome to watch Isiah Thomas' Detroit Pistons whip Larry Bird's Boston Celtics, 125-108.

20 YEARS AGO

Feb. 5, 1978: Philadelphia 76ers guard Doug Collins gives up his starting spot in the All-Star Game to Celtics great John Havlicek, who will retire at the end of the season.

30 YEARS AGO

Feb. 2, 1968: Chamberlain racks up 22 points, 25 rebounds and 21 assists in a 131-121 76ers win over Detroit to notch the only recorded triple-double-double in NBA history.



Ceballos: garbage man

TIM DEFRISCO/NBA PHOTOS

INSIDER STUFF

JUNK COLLECTORS

WHO ARE THE LEAGUE'S best garbage men? You know, the guys who rarely get plays called for them, so they have to rely on putbacks, tip-ins and opportunities off busted plays to get their points. According to NBA players, coaches and general managers who responded to an NBA INSIDE STUFF poll, Phoenix's Cedric Ceballos is the league's top junk collector, narrowly beating out Miami's P.J. Brown and Toronto's Popeye Jones. "Jones just hangs around," says one Eastern Conference coach. "He's a Rodman type, but he'll shoot it." Brown's former Heat teammate Ed Pinckney, however, left no doubt about his choice: "Cedric Ceballos. He's the king."

ASK THE PRO

WITH GHEORGHE MURESAN

JEFF REINKING/NBA PHOTOS

Muresan gets physical inside.

Q I HAVE A HEIGHT ADVANTAGE like you, and I'd like to know some of the tactics that you use in the paint. What do you recommend?

— DAN DOUGHERTY
HOLLAND, PA.

A YOU MUST ALWAYS USE WHAT is given to you. Someone with great height must learn to play with his or her back to the basket — so don't be afraid of physical contact. I learned to keep the ball above my head and to try not to put the ball on the floor in the paint because that's surrendering an advantage. My short jump hook is effective because it's a quick shot that even the more athletic centers don't have time to react to.

It's also important to create space for your teammates by drawing the opposing center out of the low-post areas. My primary job on offense when I don't have the ball is to create room for other players and to set picks. I move to the top of the key so my teammates can make backdoor cuts, go one-on-one, or find me open to take the short jump hook or jumper.

If you have a question for an NBA or WNBA player, write: One on One, NBA INSIDE STUFF Time & Life Building Rockefeller Center New York, NY 10020

Magic BUS

DANNY HELLMAN

NEW JERSEY'S MICHAEL CAGE BLOWS THE DOORS OFF OF KARL Malone when it comes to whose rig rules the road.

Last summer, Cage, an avid camper, bought and helped design a half-million-dollar super bus. The 45-foot, 45,000-pound "rolling house" (as Cage calls it) has 10 TVs, six movie screens, two VCRs, a digital satellite TV dish, a shower and bath, and enough headroom to comfortably fit someone 7-foot-2. That means either Cage expects to grow another 5 inches or he plans to invite Shaq along for one of his family's cross-country, off-season camping trips.

"It's a massive piece of machinery, a once-in-a-lifetime thing," Cage says. "I won't spend this much money on a bus again."

AFTER THE GAME...

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DANNY HELLMAN

BODY LANGUAGE

Want to get inside NBA players' heads? Just look at their arms. Or legs. According to an expert psychotherapist, their tattoos tell all.

FORGET DREAM THERAPY. FORGET HYPNOSIS. WANT TO KNOW WHAT *REALLY* MAKES players like Shaq and Rodman tick? According to Brent Nichols, a New York City psychotherapist, the answers are skin-deep. He studied the tattoos of seven NBA players to unlock the secrets of their personalities. Can you match the players with their tattoos?

TATTOO	THE PSYCHOTHERAPIST SAYS...
1	"The ancient Indians used to identify with a certain animal — a leopard, a hawk, whatever — and that animal would be their guide, their spirit power. This player has chosen a mouse. Mice are seen as little, annoying creatures that one should get rid of. They multiply, meaning their power is in their fertility. You must work hard to keep them in check. So maybe that's this man's style of play: He's tenacious, everywhere at once. He makes a nuisance of himself."
2	"The dog is one of the few animals that has been totally domesticated. Bulls, of course, are full of aggression and power. So psychologically speaking, the bulldog represents a powerful, ferocious instinct that is contained or tamed. With this person, 'the answer' is in harnessing that ferocious energy."
3	"This looks like a thorn branch. In some ancient Midwestern Indian cultures, priests used to tear open their flesh with thorns in order to sacrifice their blood to the gods. So, is this a person who is making some kind of a sacrifice, perhaps of himself for the team? Or does he just want us to know that he is suffering?"
4	"In our culture, Superman is the archetypal hero. But Superman has two sides to him. He has this hidden life. He walks around most of the time as Clark Kent, a bumbling reporter who is seen as weak. By concealing his true identity, he is able to bring something greater to the world, which is Superman."
5	"The typical apple is initially green, and when it ripens, it turns red. So this one was picked before it was ready. At the core of this apple is a skeleton skull, which represents death and the need for transformation. So this guy's rawness, or immaturity, needs to be transformed. He needs to grow up, or it will be the death of him."
6	"Fred Flintstone was this caveman who was always getting in trouble. He had good intentions but always ended up doing the wrong thing. Plus, he had an inflated sense of himself. He was often shown up by his wife, his pet and his sidekick, Barney Rubble. So perhaps this is someone who bumbles through life, has to learn the hard way, yet turns out OK."
7	"There's a lot going on here. First you have a shark jumping through the sun. The shark is a predatory animal, and the sun is a powerful symbol. Both are very masculine. The open '8' is the symbol of the bull, the astrological sign for Taurus. Underneath are Egyptian hieroglyphics that, decoded, spell Taurus. Tauruses identify with physical strength and stubbornness. Yet the moon — which is a feminine symbol — is exalted in Taurus. So maybe there is a need to balance his masculine and feminine principles. But then there are the dice, which represent chance, fate — ups and downs. This whole picture here, it's baffling. I don't know what to do about this one."

FROM TOP: DAVID LIAM KYLE/NBA PHOTOS; BILL BAPTIST/NBA PHOTOS; DAVE SHERMAN/NBA PHOTOS; ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS; RON HOSKINS/NBA PHOTOS; JED JACOBSEN/NBA PHOTOS; SAM FORENCICH/NBA PHOTOS

IDENTIFY THE OWNER

A

GREG OSTERTAG
UTAH

DENNIS RODMAN
CHICAGO

B

C

DAMON STOUDAMIRE
TORONTO

TOM GUGLIOTTA
MINNESOTA

D

E

ALLEN IVERSON
PHILADELPHIA

CHEROKEE PARKS
MINNESOTA

F

G

SHAQUILLE O'NEAL
L.A. LAKERS

FROM TOP: BARRY GOSSAGE/NBA PHOTOS; ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS; FERNANDO MEDINA/NBA PHOTOS; GLENN JAMES/NBA PHOTOS; RAY AMATI/NBA PHOTOS; BARRY GOSSAGE/NBA PHOTOS; BILL BAPTIST/NBA PHOTOS

ANSWERS: 1. C 2. E 3. D 4. G 5. F 6. A 7. B

NBA INSIDE STUFF catches up with ADRIAN DANTLEY

REMEMBER HIM?

FEW PLAYERS WERE AS AUTOMATIC IN the paint as 6-foot-5, 210-pound small forward Adrian Dantley. Despite his small size, Dantley would establish position near the basket and confound bigger, taller defenders with clever footwork and pump fakes. He made a living at the foul line, where he ranks fifth all-time in free throws made.

Dantley, a six-time All-Star, averaged 24.3 points per game over his 15-season career (1976-91) with Buffalo, Indiana, the L.A. Lakers, Utah, Detroit, Dallas and Milwaukee, twice winning the NBA scoring title (in 1981 and '84).

After retiring from the NBA, Dantley played a season in the Italian League before becoming an assistant coach at Maryland's Towson State University in 1993. Dantley took a hiatus from coaching last season but now is eager to get back on the sidelines, preferably for a big-time hoops school.

"I'm still in good-enough shape to go out there and demonstrate individual moves for the players," he says. "I'm ready to step up to the next level." — *KEVIN C. LEWIS*

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

THE INSIDER

BY AHMAD RASHAD

HOOPIN' HEAD GAMES

Here's how NBA players rattle opponents at the line.

FLASH BACK TO SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 1997: Game 1 of the NBA Finals between Chicago and Utah. MVP **KARL MALONE** is on the foul line with the game tied and nine seconds left. But as Karl prepares to shoot, **SCOTTIE PIPPEN** whispers to him, "The Mailman doesn't deliver on Sunday." Karl promptly clanks two shots, and seconds later, the Bulls win at the buzzer.

We may never know if Karl was actually affected by Scottie's words, but it was a perfect example of a time-honored NBA tradition: the foul line psych-out.

Players will try just about anything to distract an opponent at the line. Some use reverse psychology. **HERB WILLIAMS** of the Knicks remembers a player saying, "Make sure you follow through, now. You don't want to leave it short." Good advice, but the shooter probably doesn't want to hear it just then.

Others try to toy with an opponent's confidence. "You hear little things from guys who just want to get inside your head," the Nets' **KENDALL GILL** says. "Like, 'How ya doin' baby? What's happening? Tight spot — don't think about it.'"

ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS

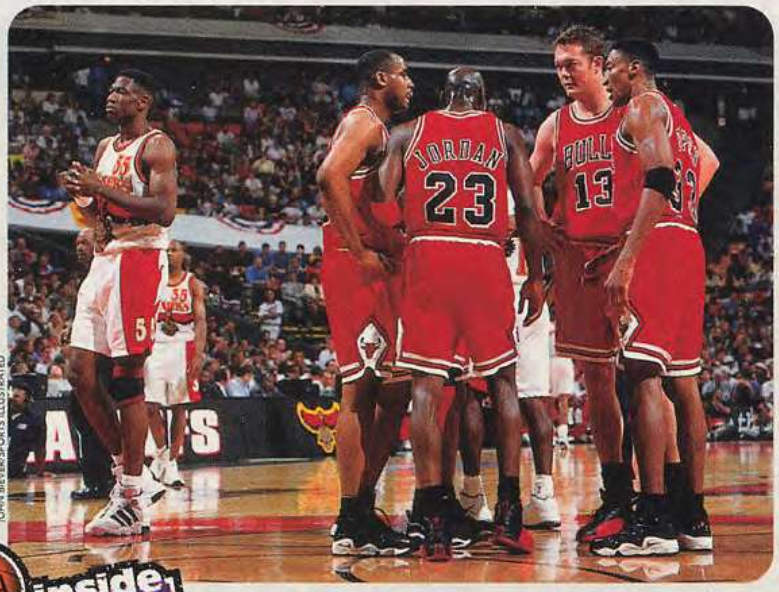
Was the Mailman a victim of Pippen's foul line psych-out?

Some players try more personal approaches, says New Jersey's **MICHAEL CAGE**. He's had opponents get on him about his physique. "Some tease me about my shoulders," he says. "I've been told, 'Don't let your shoulders get in the way of shooting free throws.'" Cage's teammate **JAYSON WILLIAMS** says, "I'll hear, 'Oh, you got too much muscle to shoot that ball, Jayson.'"

Other players use off-the-wall humor. The Hornets' **BOBBY PHILLS** remembers someone yelling, "Fore!" as a teammate shot the ball.

None of these methods seems to work on **MICHAEL JORDAN**. Once Atlanta's **DIKEMBE MUTOMBO**, then with Denver, talked to Michael at the line. M.J. responded, "Hey, Mutombo, this one's for you," and proceeded to hit the shot with his eyes closed. That will shut anybody up.

So, those are some of the ins and outs of the foul line psych-out. You're welcome to try one at your next game. If it doesn't work, keep it simple, like Charlotte's **ANTHONY MASON**. His advice? As the shooter releases the ball, just fake a sneeze.



JOHN BIEVER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Jordan can beat Dikembe Mutombo, far left, at the foul line with his eyes open or closed.

ANDY HAYT/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Opponents thought ex-Clipper Cage's big shoulders got in the way of his shot.

NBA inside STUFF

Ahmad Rashad is the managing editor of* NBA Inside Stuff, *Saturdays on NBC. Check local listings for time.

THE TOP 25 UNDER 25

YEAH, MICHAEL IS NO. 1 – FOR NOW. BUT THE STARS OF TOMORROW HAVE ARRIVED.

THE EARTH IS SHIFTING IN THE NBA. THAT rumble you heard last March when Allen Iverson positively *clowned* M.J. with an ankle-breaking crossover sent shock waves across the NBA landscape. When the Answer left His Airness flat-footed and looking behind for help, he announced that the NBA's future had officially arrived.

And what a future it is. The stars of tomorrow are taller, quicker and seemingly beyond limiting distinctions such as position. Many are full-court, three-position (or more) players who do it all.

But which player will lead the NBA into the next millennium? The editors of NBA INSIDE STUFF invited Turner Sports color analyst and former All-Star Glenn "Doc" Rivers, Sports Illustrated basketball guru Phil Taylor and *NBA Inside Stuff*'s own Ahmad Rashad to help determine the league's 25 best players under the age of 25. Then we asked some of the NBA's 50 Greatest Players to explain what makes these young ballers so great. Read on.

BY ALEX BHATTACHARJI

1 KEVIN GARNETT

Forward, Minnesota Timberwolves
6'11" • 220 lbs. • Age: 21

NO REAL SURPRISE HERE. IN MINNESOTA, KEVIN Garnett is known as Da Kid. Everywhere else, he's simply Da Man. "When I first saw him, he had the best athletic skills for his size of anyone I had ever seen at that stage," says Elgin Baylor, the Clippers' vice president of basketball operations. "He's really thin, but it doesn't matter. With his agility and coordination, he can give people trouble at the power forward, small forward and center positions."

It's Garnett's potential that leaves Jerry West, the Lakers' executive vice president of basketball operations, in awe. "It's hard to imagine someone having his knowledge of the game at his age," he says. "Offensively, he has that wonderful turnaround jump shot and those follow-ups around the basket. He's one of those guys who, because of his size and athletic ability, creates real difficult defensive matchups."

West's words take on further significance when you realize that the third-year star would only be a junior in college this season had he not gone straight to the pros.

Last season, Garnett averaged 17.0 points, 8.0 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 2.12 blocks. But the numbers, impressive as they are, tell only part of the K.G. story. Throughout the league, veteran players, coaches and general managers all give Garnett props for his innate hoops sense: He lets the game come to him. He doesn't force shots or lose control. Not since Magic Johnson came into the league has a player so young played so intelligently.

Mind you, Garnett isn't perfect. Yet. "He doesn't have a lot of moves on the court," says Magic's former teammate Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (who's been scouting players in the hope of returning to the NBA as a coach). "But the fact he's willing to learn has really helped him."

Just think what Garnett might know when he's, say, 24. Scary. As West says, "He's going to be a household name before long."

CHECK IT OUT

Garnett, at 21, became the second-youngest player ever to appear in an All-Star Game.

Garnett may be only 21, but he soars above his peers.

ENN JAMES/NBA PHOTOS

2 ALLEN IVERSON

Guard, Philadelphia 76ers • 6'0" • 165 lbs. • Age: 22

ALLEN IVERSON IS REPRESENTING. THAT IS, THE SIXERS' SPEEDY POINT GUARD represents both the best and worst in a young hoops star. No one is more talented or more explosive. But no one seems as undisciplined, either.

Maybe, just maybe, though, that's an unfair rap. Former Celtics point guard extraordinaire Bob Cousy says, "Everyone told me I wouldn't like him because he plays so out of control. But in the games I saw, he didn't force his shot and he looked to hit the open man. He looked like a pretty effective point guard to me."

Dave Bing, a pretty effective point guard himself in the 1960s and '70s, agrees. "Iverson's extremely sure of himself, [sometimes] to the point of being cocky, but I don't think that's necessarily bad," says Bing, who starred for Detroit. "He's so quick, he leaves [his teammates] behind. I don't even know that *he* knows how quick he is."

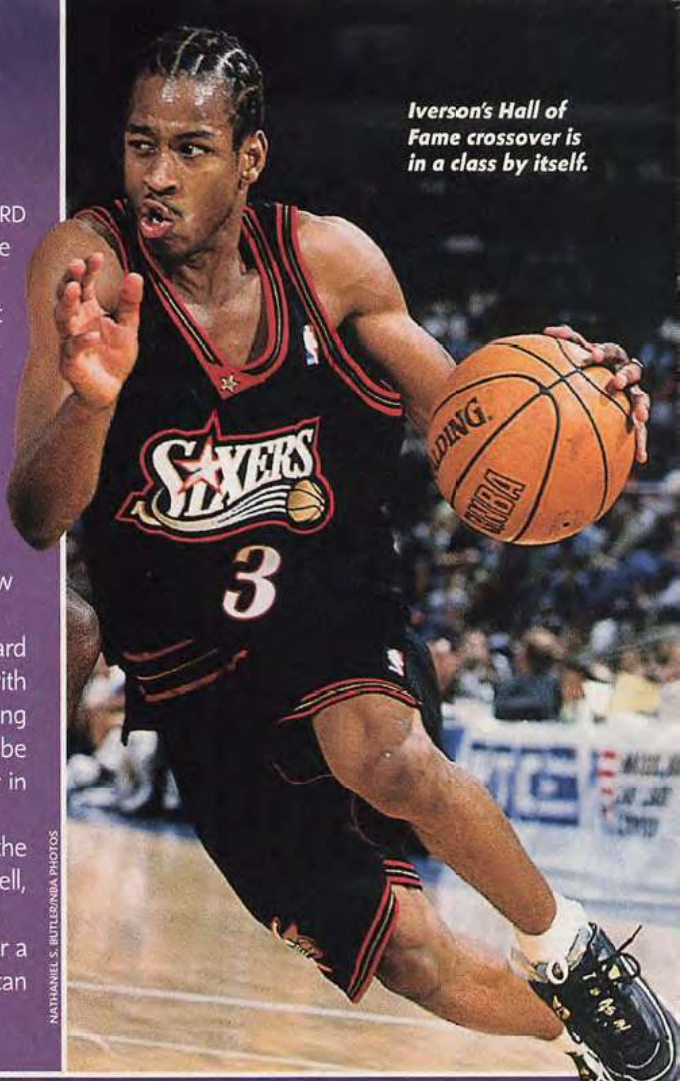
But Iverson, who had the highest scoring average (23.5) of any rookie guard since Michael Jordan in 1984-85, is about more than just speed. Blessed with incredible ups, he's a ferocious dunker despite standing only 6-feet tall. His passing and ballhandling can be dazzling. And he has the most devastating crossover in the game today (sorry, Tim).

CHECK IT OUT

Iverson was the first guard since Magic Johnson in 1979 to be drafted No. 1 overall.

So what's not to love? Turnovers, for one. Iverson led the league in that category as a rookie. And he takes some, well, *interesting* shots, so add "must improve shot selection" to Iverson's to-do list.

Age doesn't always bring maturity, but Iverson is smart. He knows that for a small price — playing in control and making an attitude adjustment — he can earn his own plaque, alongside Cousy's and Bing's, in the Hall of Fame.



Iverson's Hall of Fame crossover is in a class by itself.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

The dexterous Webber knows how to finish.

3 CHRIS WEBBER

Forward, Washington Wizards • 6'10" • 245 lbs. • Age: 24

WITH ALL THAT CHRIS WEBBER HAS BEEN THROUGH — THE DRAFT-DAY trade, the Golden State feud, trade II, the injury, injury II — it's easy to forget that he's only 24.

Last season, healthy again after recovering from a separated shoulder (for the first time since his rookie season, he played more than 70 games), C. Webb burst onto the All-Star scene. Former Knicks star Walt Frazier was not surprised. "Webber has uncanny dexterity," he says. "He's lethal in transition because he likes to take it off the dribble, shaking and baking. He's also a superb passer who goes to the glass with a vengeance and rattles home those rebounds."

Old Man Webber, who turns 25 on March 1, is the oldest player on the Top 25 list. While the injuries and trades have slowed his overall development, Webber still has managed to put up large numbers. Entering this season, the 1994 Schick NBA Rookie of the Year was averaging 19.4 points, 9.5 rebounds and 4.3 assists while shooting .524 from the floor. Think about what those numbers might be if he had stayed healthy. Not a bad career, and he's just getting warm.

CHECK IT OUT

Webber was the only rookie ever to rack up over 1,000 points, 500 rebounds, 250 assists and 75 steals.

Despite his skills, Webber's concentration can be erratic. At the line, Webber resembles Shaq (.540 career entering this season). And former Knicks center Willis Reed, now the Nets' senior vice president, says, "Emotionally, he sometimes gets a little out of control."

All right, so he's got some things to work out. "I think if you push the film ahead three, four years from now, Webber will be one of our elite players in the league," Reed says, before adding the one caveat that could derail this big-time player, "if he can keep himself healthy."

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

4 JASON KIDD

Guard, Phoenix Suns • 6'4" • 212 lbs. • Age: 24

CALL IT HARDWOOD DARWINISM. NATURAL SELECTION. ADAPT OR PERISH. THE "true" point guard seemed in danger of extinction — until Jason Kidd came along.

Kidd does all the things the classic point guards of yesterday did, only better. He looks to pass first, last and almost always. The flavor he puts into his dishes usually leaves fans shaking their heads in wonder. Kidd honestly gets off more on dropping a dime than on slamming one home. Even when he shoots and scores, he does it to open up his *passing* game, not the other way around. No wonder the breed is almost extinct.

CHECK IT OUT

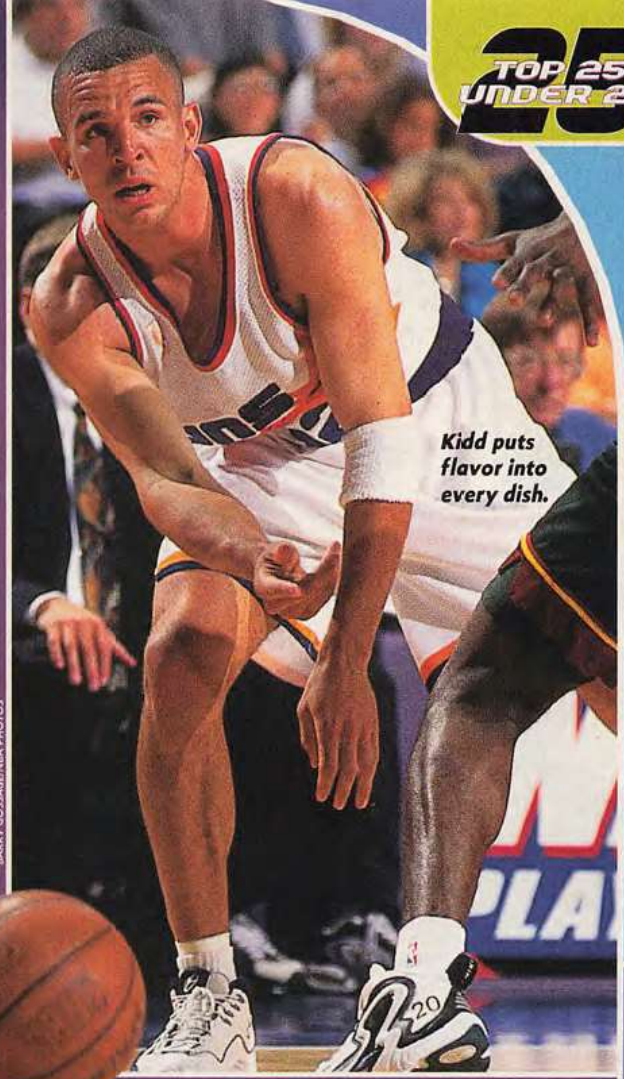
Entering 1997-98, Kidd already had 15 career triple-doubles — 17th all-time.

What impresses former Golden State great Rick Barry most about Kidd, however, has nothing to do with ball distribution or shot selection. "The thing I like most about Kidd is that he's tough," Barry says. "I mean, this guy isn't afraid of anybody."

But, oh, how opponents fear seeing Kidd in the open floor. "His passing is like Magic Johnson's," Walt Frazier says. "He was being mentioned in the same breath as Magic when he was in *high school*. And I've never seen anyone dribble up the court quicker. He can dribble the ball faster than other players sprint up the court."

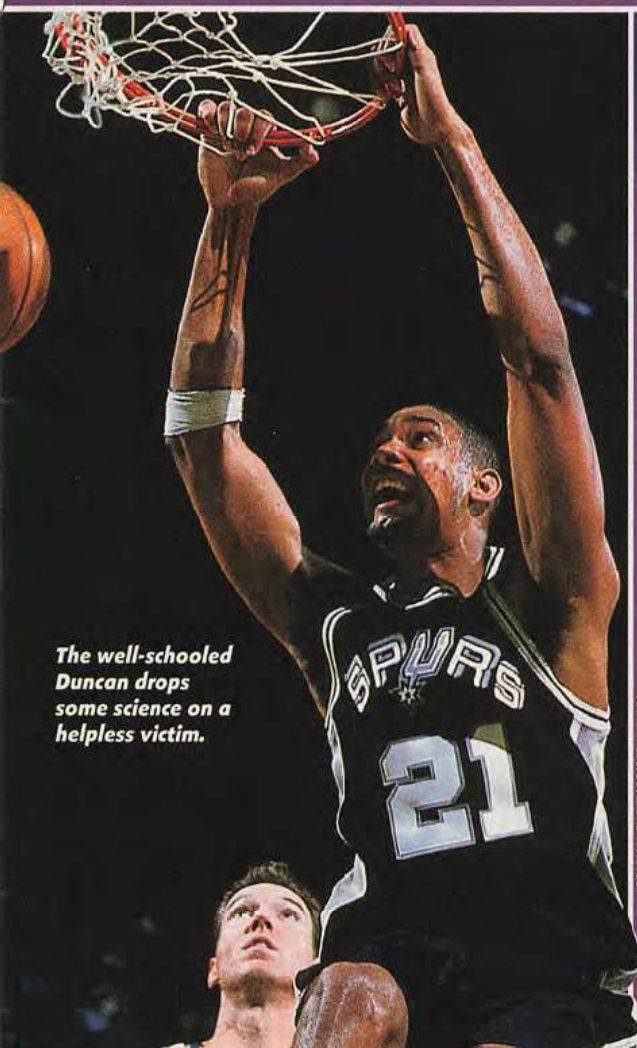
As a member of the Dallas Mavericks, Kidd was named the Schick NBA co-Rookie of the Year in 1995 (with Grant Hill) and was an All-Star in 1996. But when disharmony split apart the Mavs, Kidd weathered some tough times.

The trade last season to Phoenix rejuvenated him. Kidd dished off 9.0 assists a night for the season and was an integral part of the Suns' three-guard sprint to the playoffs. He still has a suspect jumper, but he never forces his shot — nor does he need to shoot to be effective. In a test of survival of the fittest, Jason Kidd is passing.



Kidd puts flavor into every dish.

BARRY GOSSAGE/NBA PHOTOS



The well-schooled Duncan drops some science on a helpless victim.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

5 TIM DUNCAN

Forward/Center, San Antonio Spurs • 7'0" • 248 lbs. • Age: 21

BY CURRENT NBA STANDARDS, ROOKIE TIM DUNCAN MUST HAVE HOLES IN HIS GAME. The thinking is, if he's so good, why didn't he come out sooner?

Wake up. Duncan probably would have been the top pick in the 1996 NBA Draft, too. His four years of schooling will pay off in the end, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar insists. "Subjecting himself to learning and maturing in a college atmosphere was wiser than entering the NBA early," he says.

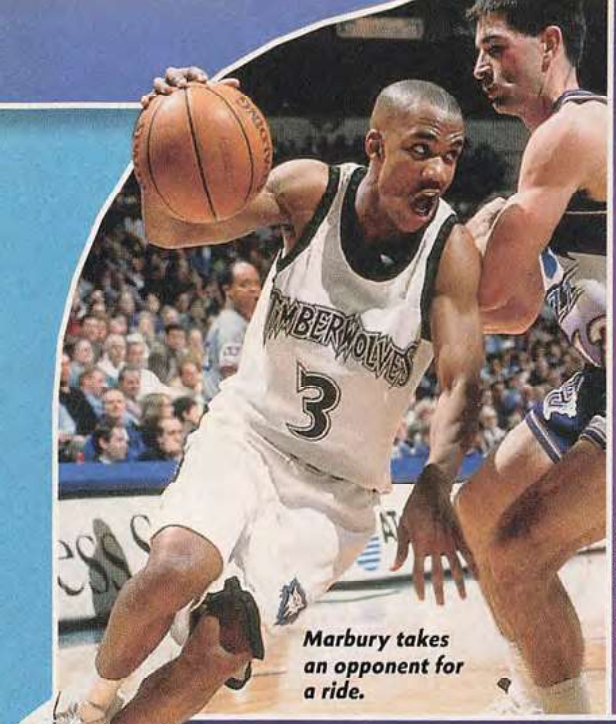
Abdul-Jabbar's former coach Jerry West is a big — make that *huge* — fan of Duncan's. "The thing [I] like about him is the maturity, the poise, the instinctive way he plays the game, which you cannot teach," West says. "He's an instinctive passer, and he sees the court as well or better than a lot of guards, to be honest. He reminds me a little of Abdul-Jabbar, except he doesn't have a hook shot. Looking at him, [I] see nothing but greatness. [He'll be] mentioned in the same breath as some of the great centers who have ever played."

CHECK IT OUT

Duncan was the first senior since Larry Johnson in 1991 to be drafted No. 1 overall.

Duncan will never be the tallest or strongest center. ("I don't see him going head up with Shaquille O'Neal," Elgin Baylor says. "But who can?") But his post game already boasts the variety of a veteran, and — like so many of the young stars — he's ultraversatile, with solid skills facing the basket and great shooting range for a big man. Abdul-Jabbar even sees him as a new-breed small forward. At this stage, the only knock on Duncan is his one-on-one defense.

But with his great attitude and work ethic, that should quickly improve. That's why West goes gaga over Duncan. "He's tremendous," West says, "and he hasn't even breathed, as far as his NBA career."



Marbury takes an opponent for a ride.

GLENN JAMES/NBA PHOTOS

6 STEPHON MARBURY

Guard, Minnesota Timberwolves • 6'2" • 180 lbs. • Age: 20

THE CYCLONE AT THE AMUSEMENT PARK IN CONEY ISLAND, BROOKLYN, IS A ROLLER coaster that sets you up for the fall, then leaves your knees quaking. So, too, does Coney Island's favorite son, Stephon Marbury.

Last season, Marbury took opponents for a ride with a thrilling 15.8 points and 7.8 assists per game. That earned him a spot on the Schick NBA All-Rookie First Team. "Marbury's a threat whenever he has the ball," Dave Bing says. "He's a guy who looks to really get his teammates off, but he has the uncanny ability to also create things for himself."

CHECK IT OUT
Marbury led all rookies in assists per game last season with 7.8.

Marbury loves to make the crowd-pleasing feed or jaw-dropping move. But he can also throw it down and pop from outside. What's most impressive, though, is his leadership skill. As a rookie, Marbury helped guide the Wolves to their first-ever playoff berth. "For his age and his experience, he's a very, very mature player," Bing says. "The sky's the limit for him."

7 JUWAN HOWARD

Forward, Washington Wizards • 6'9" • 240 lbs. • Age: 24

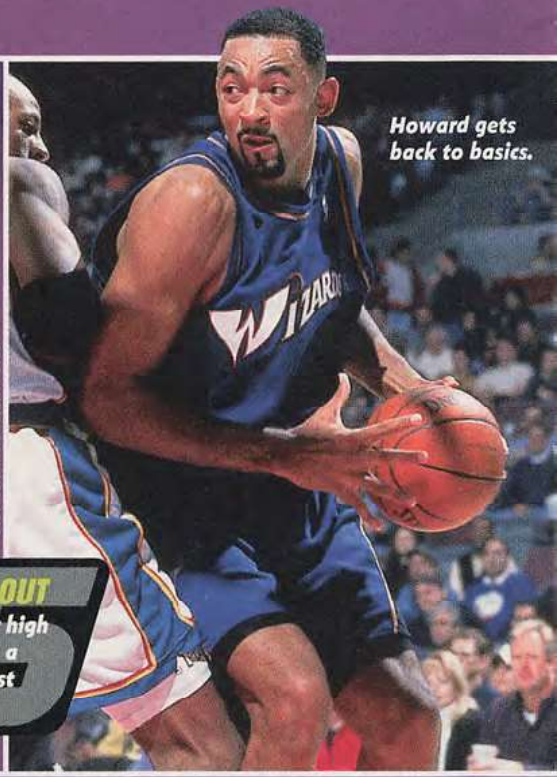
EVERY COACH FROM GRADE SCHOOL ON PREACHES, "LEARN THE BASICS." WELL, JUWAN Howard is one player who actually listened.

"Howard is so fundamentally sound," Willis Reed says. "He's a throwback to the guys who played years ago. He gets the ball, and he gets things done with it or he passes it."

Howard's game does have spice — he fills terrifically on the break and jams with authority — but his street rep suffers from playing alongside his flashy Fab Five homeboy, Chris Webber. In fact, Howard's most productive season came two years ago, when Webber was injured. "Howard defers to Webber when they're [on the floor together]," Walt Frazier says. "But he has a better all-around game than Webber."

Howard's turnarounds and drop-step J's don't make him a regular on *SportsCenter*. Still, over his first three seasons, he averaged 19.6 points, 8.1 rebounds and 3.7 assists. He was selected to participate in the All-Star Game and was voted to the All-NBA Third Team in 1996.

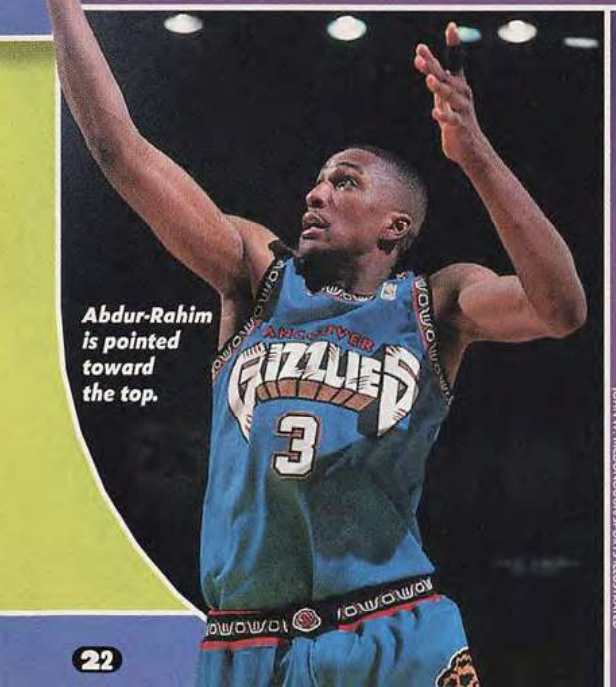
Those are the kinds of tributes that high school coaches love to hear.



Howard gets back to basics.

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

CHECK IT OUT
Howard's career high of 42 points in a game is the most of any Wizard.



Abdur-Rahim is pointed toward the top.

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

8 SHAREEF ABDUR-RAHIM

Forward, Vancouver Grizzlies • 6'9" • 230 lbs. • Age: 21

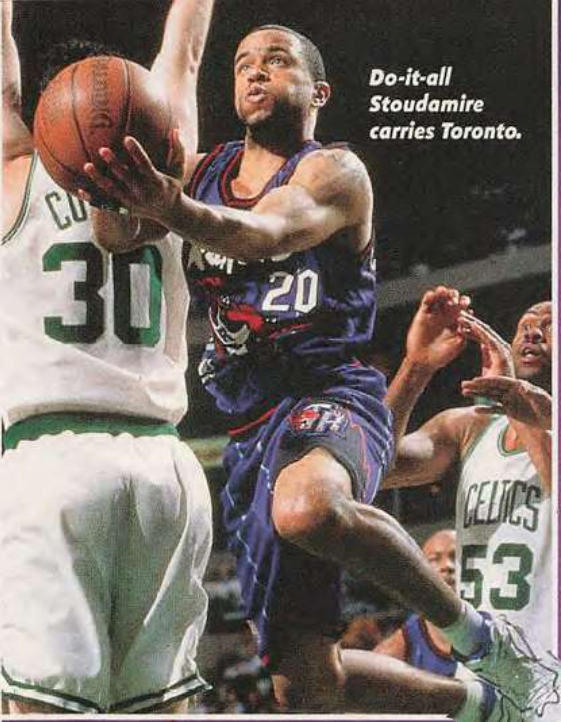
SHAREEF ABDUR-RAHIM IS HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. IN FACT, FIVE TIMES A DAY, the devout Muslim checks a compass to locate east, toward Mecca, for his prayers. Now the second-year Grizzlies forward is looking to take Vancouver north in the standings.

Abdur-Rahim's monster rookie season, in which he averaged 18.7 points and 6.9 rebounds, raised eyebrows south of the border. "He's a scoring machine with the potential to be the league scoring leader some year," says Jerry West. "He's got a terrific ability to put the ball on the floor and get to the basket. He's long, he's quick, and he can shoot with some range."

CHECK IT OUT
Abdur-Rahim averaged 21.3 ppg after the All-Star break last season.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar agrees, saying, "He's a classic 3 man. He reminds me of James Worthy. He's got the skills and attitude to be a real player for a long time."

Both West and Abdul-Jabbar feel Abdur-Rahim needs to beef up and put more energy into playing D. But on offense, Abdur-Rahim doesn't need a compass to find his way to the hoop.



SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

9 DAMON STOUDAMIRE

Guard, Toronto Raptors • 5'10" • 171 lbs. • Age: 24

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU CALL SHORT. NAPOLEON HAD A COMPLEX ABOUT BEING vertically challenged, and he almost conquered the world. Damon Stoudamire isn't that ambitious — he'll settle for taking over the NBA.

The man known as Mighty Mouse entered this season, his third, averaging 19.6 points, 9.0 assists and — get this — 4.0 rebounds. Stoudamire, the 1996 Schick NBA Rookie of the Year, has carried the expansion Raptors with his dribbling, shooting and lightning-quick change of direction. Billy Cunningham, who starred as both a player and coach for the 76ers, is impressed. "Stoudamire has been forced into a situation where he's had to do everything for his team — scoring and leading them in every facet of the game," he says. "As he gets more talent around him, he will become better at distributing the ball. But he could truly be one of the finest point guards in the league, if he isn't there now."

That's fine with Stoudamire. He figures he's right on target for league domination.

CHECK IT OUT

Stoudamire led the Raptors in scoring (20.2), assists (8.8) and treys (176) last season.

10 RASHEED WALLACE

Forward/Center, Portland Trail Blazers • 6'10" • 230 lbs. • Age: 23

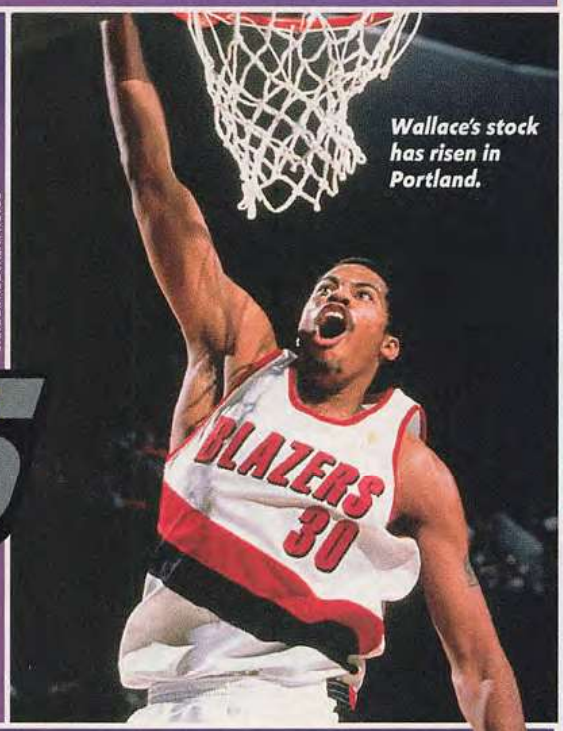
LIKE WARREN COOLIDGE, THE BIG MAN ON *THE WHITE SHADOW*, RASHEED WALLACE once thought he could get by on his size, a shot and a few simple moves. Not in the NBA, Rasheed.

After a disappointing rookie year in Washington, however, Wallace found new skills — and a new life — in Portland. "He made more improvements than anyone last season," says Julius Erving, the former aerial wizard with the Nets and Sixers. "For his size, that kind of shooting ability is rare. Robert Parish had that kind of game, where he didn't have to take it all the way to the hole to score." Indeed, Wallace increased his scoring by almost 50 percent (up to 15.1) and went to the line more than twice as often as he did his rookie season.

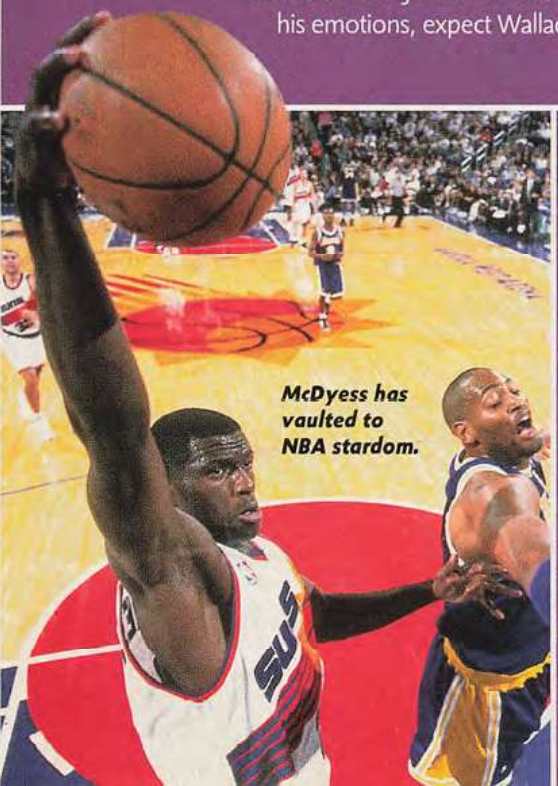
The only thing standing in Wallace's way is himself. "He's got to control his attitude," Walt Frazier says. "He's got a tendency to lose his cool, get technicals and go off. He loses his focus on the court." If he contains his emotions, expect Wallace soon to be a prime-time player.

CHECK IT OUT

Wallace finished third in the NBA in field goal percentage (.558) last season.



STEVE DIPAOLA/NBA PHOTOS



ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

11 ANTONIO McDYESS

Forward, Phoenix Suns • 6'9" • 220 lbs. • Age: 23

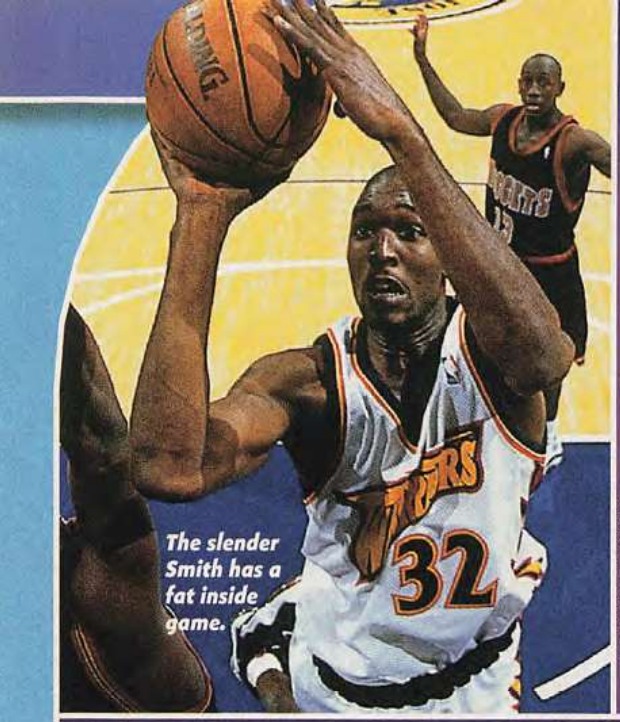
THREE YEARS AGO, ANTONIO McDYESS WAS CONSIDERED JUST ANOTHER BALLER WITH RAW athletic talent. But three months before the 1995 NBA Draft, the lanky forward made the scouts rethink their opinions of him. On the strength of two NCAA tournament games and a few predraft workouts, McDyess vaulted from obscurity to become the second player chosen in that year's draft (by the Clippers, then traded to the Nuggets).

Two years of on-the-job training later, a star has been born. Last season, he averaged 18.3 points, 7.3 boards and 1.70 blocks. "When you say, 'McDyess,' I see a guy playing way up above the rim," Walt Frazier says. "He really skies. He has a complete game, a lot of skills. I was surprised how well he can shoot. He can go inside with quickness. He's the catalyst."

McDyess is not quite a complete player — he needs to keep hitting the weights — but next summer, he should once again find himself the center of attention, this time during the free-agent sweepstakes. But don't think Phoenix will let him go without a fight. Unique talents like McDyess don't come around that often.

CHECK IT OUT

McDyess has a vertical leap of nearly 4 feet (47 inches).



The slender Smith has a fat inside game.

SAM FORENCICH/NBA PHOTOS

12 JOE SMITH

Forward, Golden State Warriors • 6'10" • 225 lbs. • Age: 22

IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY, YOU CAN HEAR IT. IT'S THE SOUND OF JOE SMITH BECOMING a serious baller. The soft swish of Smith's turnaround jumper would make big noise on a playoff-bound team. But on Golden State, a club mired in mediocrity, Smith remains one of the most anonymous first-overall draft picks ever.

In his own quiet way, Smith has developed into a potent scorer with a smooth inside game. At 225 pounds, though, the slender Smith may be overmatched at the 4 spot. His 18.7 scoring and 8.5 rebound averages last season came more from finesse than *large*-esse.

CHECK IT OUT

Last season, Smith increased his points and assists, but he slipped in rebounds, blocked shots and steals.

"He's been a good pro, but he must get stronger," Elgin Baylor says. "Playing power forward can take its toll night after night, especially against players like Karl Malone."

At times last season, Smith was guilty of playing matador defense, and his work on the glass was half-hearted. But this being his contract year, expect Smith to make some serious noise.

13 KERRY KITTLES

Guard, New Jersey Nets • 6'5" • 179 lbs. • Age: 23

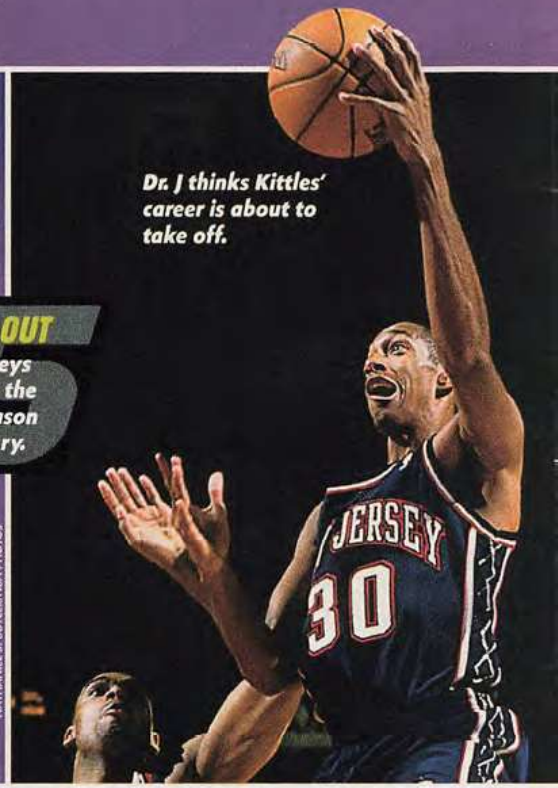
IT'S NOT EASY TO LAY A FOUNDATION IN A SWAMP. BUT IN THE MARSHES OF THE Meadowlands, where New Jersey plays its home games, Kerry Kittles has become the Nets' bedrock.

Sharp-shooting Kittles showed last season why the Nets are building around him — he averaged 16.4 points, 3.9 boards, 3.0 assists and 1.91 steals. Julius Erving, who led the Nets to ABA championships in 1974 and '76, thinks the second-year guard's career is about to take off. "I'm really high on Kerry," he says. "He came into his first season well prepared and ready to make the sacrifices to become a good pro player. I think he will challenge for All-Star status this season."

CHECK IT OUT

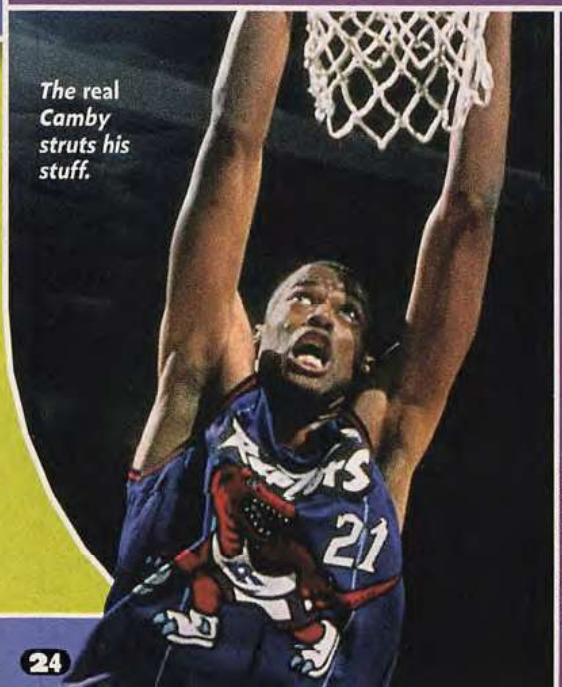
Kittles' 158 treys last season was the highest single-season total in Nets history.

With his lanky frame and deadly jumper, Kittles most closely resembles Reggie Miller. While his stroke doesn't quite measure up to Miller's, Kittles is quicker and is already a better defender. He's a dynamic open-court player who would benefit from some added bulk and a better post-up game. But with his energy, speed and that sweet, sweet J, Kittles is already rock-solid.



Dr. J thinks Kittles' career is about to take off.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS



The real Camby struts his stuff.

NOREN TROTMAN/NBA PHOTOS

14 MARCUS CAMBY

Forward, Toronto Raptors • 6'11" • 220 lbs. • Age: 23

NO WAY THE GUY YOU SAW LAST SEASON WEARING NO. 21 FOR THE RAPTORS WAS Marcus Camby. Not the real Camby, anyway. That person was an injury-hampered player who was beset by off-court troubles — nothing at all like the charismatic star who once lit it up at UMass. Near the end of last season, though, Camby began to emerge. He came on strong enough to finish with 14.8 points and 6.3 rebounds per game and land a spot on the Schick NBA All-Rookie Second Team.

The *real* Camby made his debut this season. He's the small forward in a big forward's body who plays high above the rim and swats away shots like he's playing volleyball.

CHECK IT OUT

Camby was 10th (tops among rookies) in the league with 2.06 blocks per game last season.

Willis Reed thinks Camby is just a personal trainer away from stardom. "Camby has unique skills for his size," he says. "He's very quick, he can shoot and handle the ball. But [his lack of] strength may be his Achilles' heel."

Toronto's up-tempo style, though, emphasizes speed and skill over size and power. In that regard, Camby is a perfect fit. That is, the real Marcus Camby.

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M. LA Lakers
N. Miami Heat
O. Milwaukee Bucks
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9. Orders must be postmarked by September 30, 1998 and received by October 12, 1998. Mail to: Nestlé Slammin' Jammin' NBA Gear '97-'98, P. O. Box 8158, Young America, MN 55551-8158. Please allow 10-12 weeks for shipment of your entire Nestlé Slammin' Jammin' NBA Gear order.

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NBA Team Water Bottle				x	15	=		$2.00	$
NBA Pencil Case from Spalding				x	25	=		$2.00	$
NBA Team Seat Cushion				x	35	=		$4.00	$
NBA Team Cap				x	65	=		$3.50	$
NBA on TNT T-Shirt				x	70	=		$4.00	$
NBA Team T-Shirt				x	85	=		$4.00	$
NBA Team Fashion Jersey				x	120	=		$4.00	$
NBA Team Back Pack				x	140	=		$7.50	$
EA Sports NBA Live '98 Game (Circle Format: SONY Playstation, PC CD-ROM, Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, Sega Saturn)				x	150	=		$4.00	$
NBA Team Jacket from Starter				x	550	=		$11.00	$

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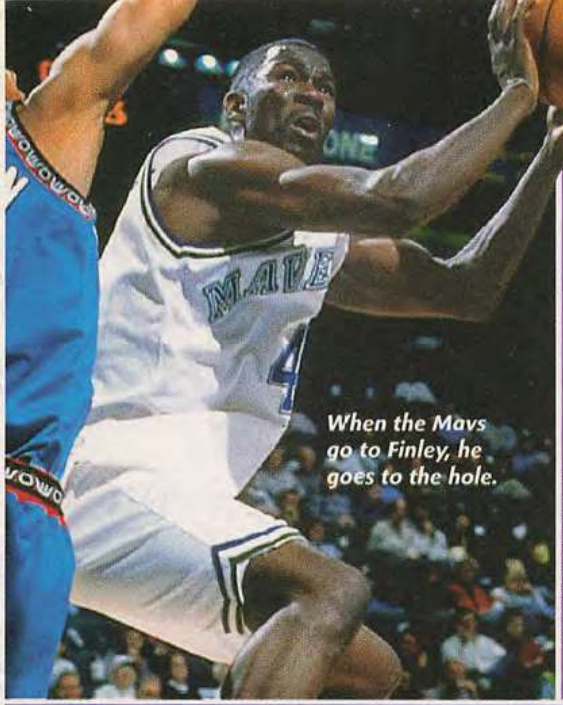
Party Bags	13.0 to 14.0	5
Fun Size Bags	12.0 to 14.0	5
6-Packs (use 6 single size wrappers inside)		6


When the Mavs go to Finley, he goes to the hole.

LAYNE MURDOCH/NBA PHOTOS

15 MICHAEL FINLEY

Guard/Forward, Dallas Mavericks • 6'7" • 215 lbs. • Age: 24

WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY DEFINES A *MAVERICK* AS AN INDEPENDENT INDIVIDUAL who does not go along with the group. We define it as Michael Finley.

Turning that ugly, hilarious cartwheel in last season's Nestlé Crunch Slam Dunk contest, Finley certainly proved his independent nature. He botched that shot, but his aerial creativity rarely misses in games. "Finley's a tough player," Dave Bing says. "He's a terrific leaper and has great range on his jump shot. He fills the lanes very well. And I think he's going to learn how to use his quickness to go around people. He's a threat [from] everywhere."

CHECK IT OUT

Finley's 39.2 minutes per game in 1995-96 set a Suns rookie record.

Finley's progress was impeded last year by the midseason trade that sent him from Phoenix to Dallas. This season, as the centerpiece of the Mavericks' offense, he will look to boost his career averages of 15.0 points, 4.5 rebounds and 3.1 assists. "He was not a go-to guy in Phoenix," Bing says. "But I think he can become that now."

Go-to guy. Look it up. It, too, means Michael Finley.

16 ANTOINE WALKER

Forward, Boston Celtics • 6'9" • 245 lbs. • Age: 21

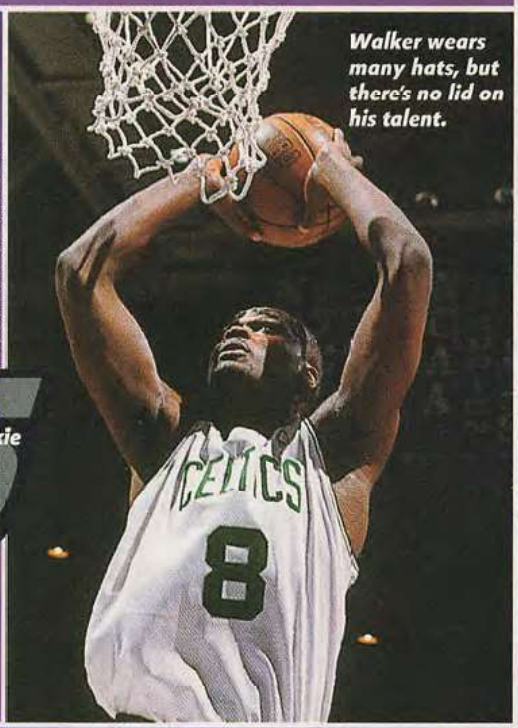
ANTOINE WALKER IS THE NBA'S MAD HATTER. HE WEARS SO MANY FOR THE CELTICS, he's impossible to categorize. Though labeled a power forward, Walker played significant minutes at all five positions last season, averaging 17.5 points, 9.0 rebounds and 3.2 assists. He was named to the Schick NBA All-Rookie First Team. "He's got all the skills," Bob Cousy says. "He needs to get it all together. Last season, he did things too quickly and got out of control at times. But he has the whole package."

Under the tutelage of his Kentucky — and now Celtics — coach, Rick Pitino, Walker is thriving. He may not play every position this season — Pitino is shuffling him between the 3 and 4 spots — but he can still do it all. Walker relies too much on his jumper at times, but with his ability to score on the break, in the post and off the dribble, he can put up numbers in bunches.

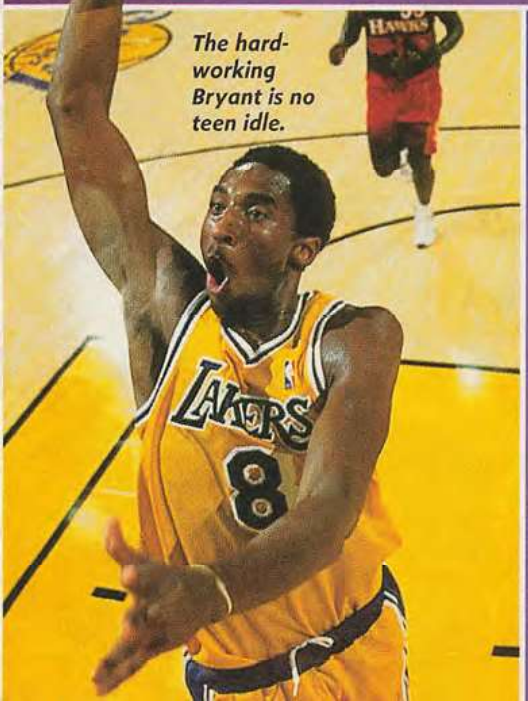
CHECK IT OUT

Walker was the only rookie to lead his team in both scoring and rebounding last season.

This season, Antoine Walker is wearing a new hat: franchise player. And it fits nicely.


Walker wears many hats, but there's no lid on his talent.

BRIAN SPURLOCK/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED


The hard-working Bryant is no teen idle.

ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS

17 KOBE BRYANT

Guard, Los Angeles Lakers • 6'7" • 210 lbs. • Age: 19

TEEN SENSATIONS COME AND GO. JOEY LAWRENCE, NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK, KRIS KROSS — where are they now? Kobe Bryant, however, is built for long-term success.

Bryant had a decent first season — good enough to make the Schick NBA All-Rookie Second Team. Yet he worked his butt off over the summer and entered this season stronger and even more explosive. Getting PT won't be an issue anymore.

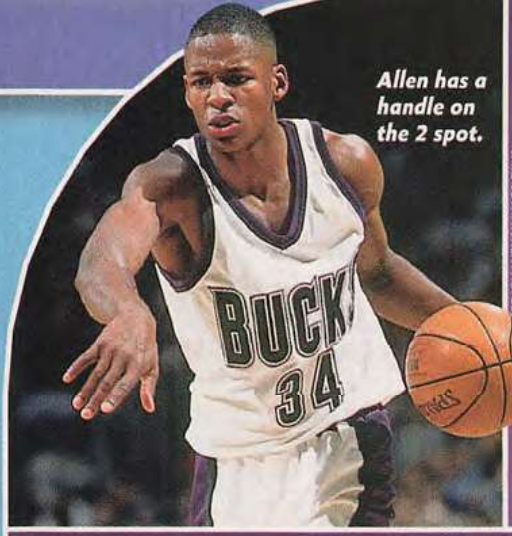
"I don't think anyone has any questions about his God-given talent as a basketball player," Billy Cunningham says. "It's going to take a little time, but if he refines his defensive skills, Kobe Bryant is earmarked for greatness."

CHECK IT OUT

Last season, Bryant became the youngest player ever to start an NBA game (18 years, 5 months, 5 days).

Bryant's ballhandling and jumping ability leap off the charts, his J is getting longer, and his moves are electrifying. Last All-Star Weekend, he showed flashes of things to come when he erupted for 31 points in the Schick Rookie Game and won the Nestlé Crunch Slam Dunk contest.

But flashes are no longer enough. Redirect that spotlight. Bryant is about to move center stage.



Allen has a handle on the 2 spot.

CHRIS COVATTA/NBA PHOTOS

18 RAY ALLEN

Guard, Milwaukee Bucks • 6'5" • 205 lbs. • Age: 22

TWO WORDS FOR RAY ALLEN: BUCK UP. THINGS IN MILWAUKEE are already much better this season for the dead-eye 2-guard.

Playing alongside Glenn Robinson and Vin Baker, Allen rarely saw the ball as a rookie. Still, he managed to average 13.4 points. "Coming in at the toughest position to play, I thought Allen faired rather well under difficult circumstances," Julius Erving says. "He will have a better chance to blossom [this season]."

Allen needs to improve both his ballhandling and passing. With new backcourtmate Terrell Brandon getting him plenty of touches, he'll have the opportunity.

CHECK IT OUT

Allen led the team last season with 117 treys, a Bucks rookie record.

19 KEITH VAN HORN

Forward, New Jersey Nets • 6'10" • 220 lbs. • Age: 22

NOW PLAYING AT AN ARENA NEAR YOU: *WHITE MEN CAN JUMP*, STARRING KEITH VAN HORN. New Jersey's rookie can flat-out fly. That's not all the No. 2 overall pick in the 1997 NBA Draft can do. A pure shooter, Van Horn can stick the three. He also runs the floor well, can pass and can go to the glass.

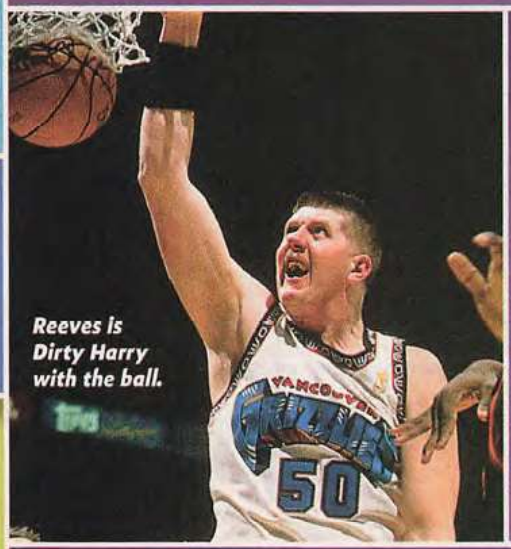
CHECK IT OUT

Van Horn averaged 20.8 ppg and 8.8 rpg while shooting .522 from the field and .401 on threes in college.

The only problem Walt Frazier sees is identifying his true position. "He's not a power forward, he's not a small forward," Frazier says. "He's in-between. [Teams will try to] isolate him on D and put pressure on him to become a defensive player."

A preseason ankle injury could slow his development, but judging from the previews, Van Horn should be a big-time box-office hit.

BRIAN SPURLOCK/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



Reeves is Dirty Harry with the ball.

CHRISTOPHER J. PELKE/NBA PHOTOS

20 BRYANT REEVES

Center, Vancouver Grizzlies • 7'0" • 275 lbs. • Age: 24

"A MAN'S GOT TO KNOW HIS LIMITATIONS," CLINT EASTWOOD'S DIRTY HARRY CALLAHAN snarled in *Magnum Force*. That's Vancouver's Bryant Reeves.

Sure, the Grizzlies are forced to play four-on-five at times while Big Country lumbers down the court. But the man has a polished post game. "Big Country does not have the athletic skill of a lot of centers," Elgin Baylor says. "He's not a shot-blocker or rebounder. But he has terrific offensive skills."

CHECK IT OUT

In 1996-97, Reeves ranked behind only Shaq and Alonzo Mourning in scoring among centers under age 30.

Last season, his second, Reeves added some new tricks to an already smooth turnaround and drop-step. As a result, he increased his averages to 16.2 points and 8.1 boards. How many NBA centers can boast those numbers?

21 JERRY STACKHOUSE

Guard/Forward, Philadelphia 76ers • 6'6" • 218 lbs. • Age: 23

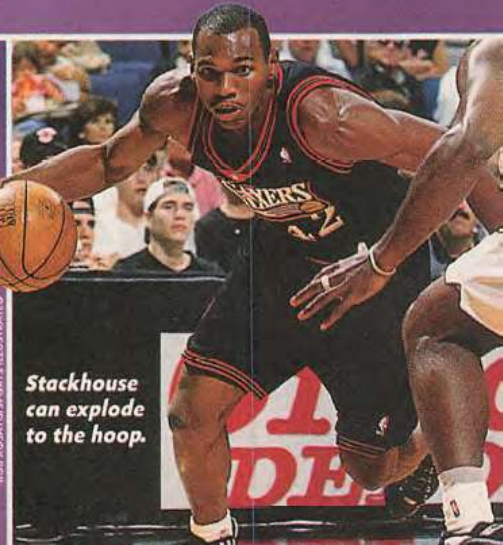
AFTER A STELLAR ROOKIE SEASON, PHILADELPHIA'S JERRY STACKHOUSE GOT CAUGHT UP IN AN I-can-shoot-more-than-you-can contest with teammate Allen Iverson — and lost. Still, Stack was good for 20.7 points per game. So what's the problem?

CHECK IT OUT

Stackhouse led all rookies in scoring in 1995-96 with 19.2 ppg.

"Can he consistently make the jump shot?" Willis Reed asks. "I like his physical ability. But [shooting is] the part of his game he must improve. He's potentially an All-Star."

Stackhouse is explosive and creative going to the hoop. But he sometimes forces shots and loses the ball on his drive. The potential is there. Now if Stackhouse can just keep from getting caught up in the hype.


Stackhouse can explode to the hoop.

BOB ROSATO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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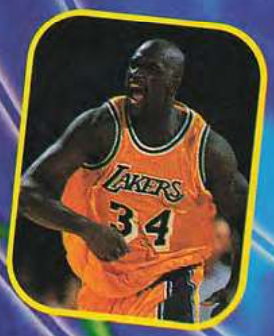

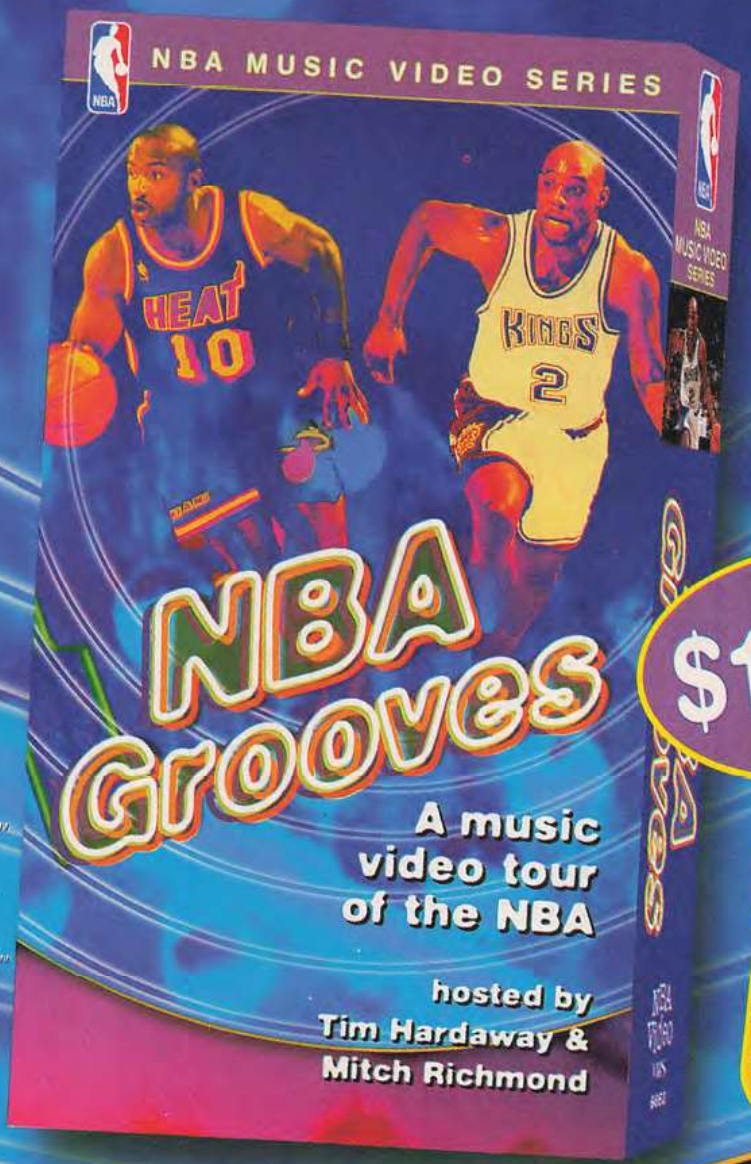

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No Doubt *"Just A Girl"*
Reel 2 Real *"I Like to Move It"*
OMC *"How Bizarre"*
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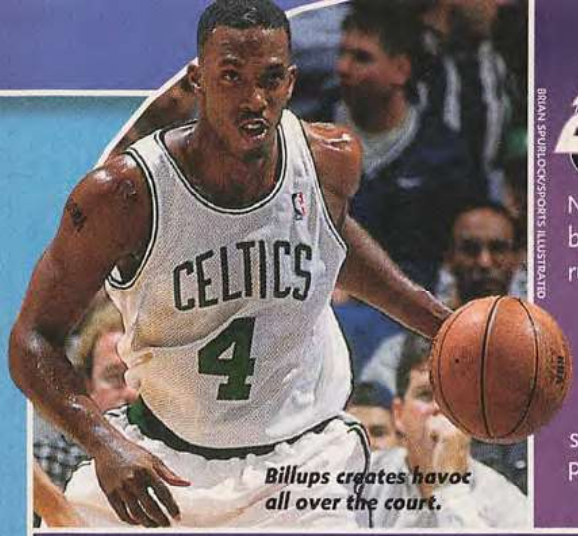


Billups creates havoc all over the court.

BRIAN SPURLOCK/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

22 CHAUNCEY BILLUPS

Guard, Boston Celtics • 6'3" • 202 lbs. • Age: 21

NINETY-FOUR FEET BY 50 FEET. THOSE ARE THE DIMENSIONS OF A basketball court, and Boston rookie Chauncey Billups loves to run and create havoc over every inch of it.

Billups has a full offensive toolbox: good range on his J, quick dribble penetration, an aerial finish and a pinpoint feed. But he'll be asked to do a lot this season.

"He'll have an up-and-down start because of the position he plays," Billy Cunningham says. After watching how Billups turned around Colorado's hoops program, coach Rick Pitino believes his young point guard is up to the task.

CHECK IT OUT

Billups, at No. 3, was the first guard drafted in 1997 and the highest pick from the Big 12 since 1988.

23 BOB SURA

Guard, Cleveland Cavaliers • 6'5" • 200 lbs. • Age: 24

FREE AT LAST. WITH CLEVELAND FINALLY SCRAPPING ITS SNAIL-BALL OFFENSE, THIRD-YEAR GUARD Bob Sura can at last show what he's made of.

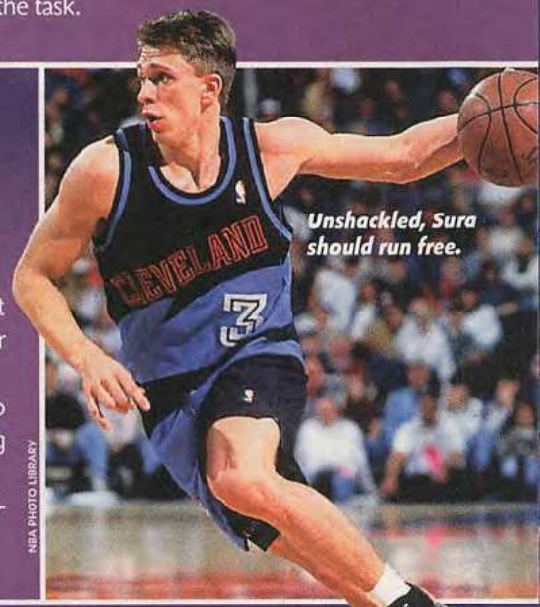
Sura is strong and athletic, with a nice handle, a powerful first step and big-time leaping ability. It's hard to say whether he's a 1 or a 2 at heart. Still, Sura should benefit from the Cavs' faster tempo.

"He's been playing in a style that's inhibitive, but he has the skills to make the plays," Bob Cousy says. "I'm not sure we've seen everything from him yet."

What he has shown is promising. As a starter in the final 12 games last season, Sura averaged 13.5 points and 5.9 assists. Those numbers could soar now that the handcuffs are off.

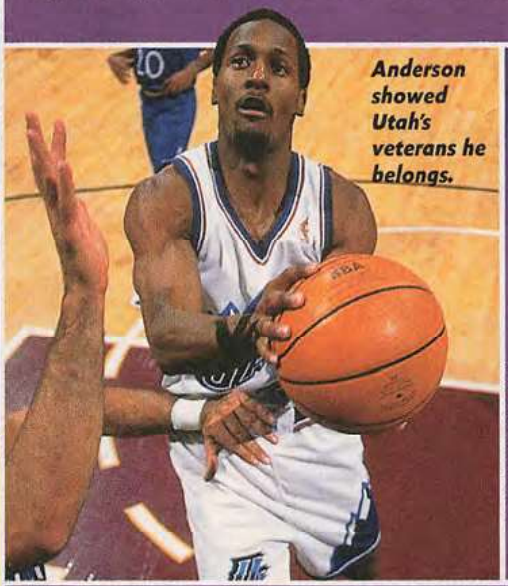
CHECK IT OUT

Sura was part of a Florida State backcourt with Charlie Ward and Sam Cassell.



Unshackled, Sura should run free.

NBA PHOTO LIBRARY


Anderson showed Utah's veterans he belongs.

BARRY GOSSAGE/NBA PHOTOS

24 SHANDON ANDERSON

Forward, Utah Jazz • 6'6" • 210 lbs. • Age: 24

WHAT DO GMs KNOW? AFTER ALL, 25 OF THOSE BRILLIANT HOOPS MINDS IGNORED SHANDON Anderson in the 1996 NBA Draft — some more than once. In all, 53 players were chosen before Utah selected Anderson.

As a rookie, Anderson was a key sub for the NBA Finalists, averaging 5.9 points and 2.8 rebounds while playing like a seasoned veteran. "He is very calm on the court," Walt Frazier says. "He fits [Utah's] style. He gets second-chance points in the half court and good percentage shots in the open court. He's a good defender, too."

Don't be fooled by the fact that Anderson won't get big minutes playing for the veteran Jazz. You'll be hearing from him soon enough.

CHECK IT OUT

Anderson has played more playoff games (18) than any of the Top 25 players.

25 BREVIN KNIGHT

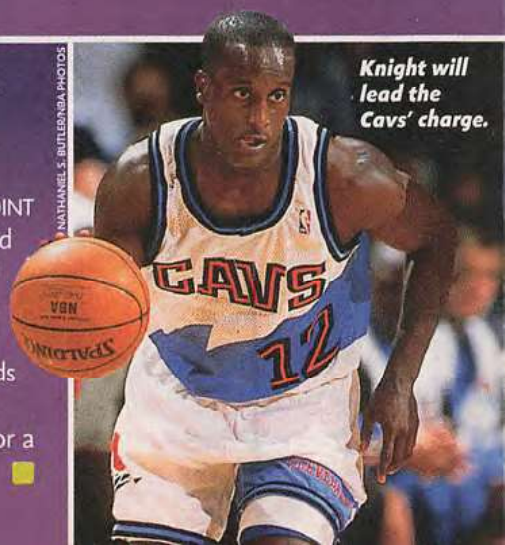
Guard, Cleveland Cavaliers • 5'10" • 173 lbs. • Age: 22

SHAWN KEMP, MEET BREVIN KNIGHT — YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND. KNIGHT, CLEVELAND'S ROOKIE POINT guard, started the season behind Bob Sura. But don't think the Cavs traded Terrell Brandon and then his replacement, Sherman Douglas, without knowing who would ultimately run the show. The speedy Knight can direct Cleveland's new up-tempo offense. "He has a good head for the point guard position," says Isiah Thomas, former Pistons great at the point. "He understands passing, penetrating, getting into the lane, and he's a competitor."

Watch Knight push the ball upcourt and make an ill dish to Kemp for a thundering finish. You're seeing the start of a beautiful relationship.

CHECK IT OUT

As a senior at Stanford, Knight was second in the nation with 7.8 apg.



Knight will lead the Cavs' charge.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

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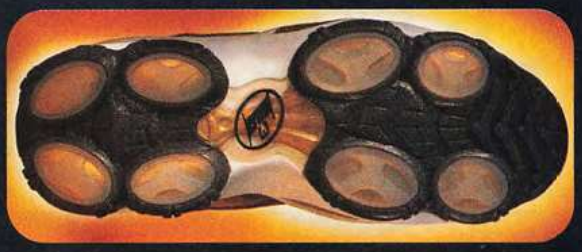

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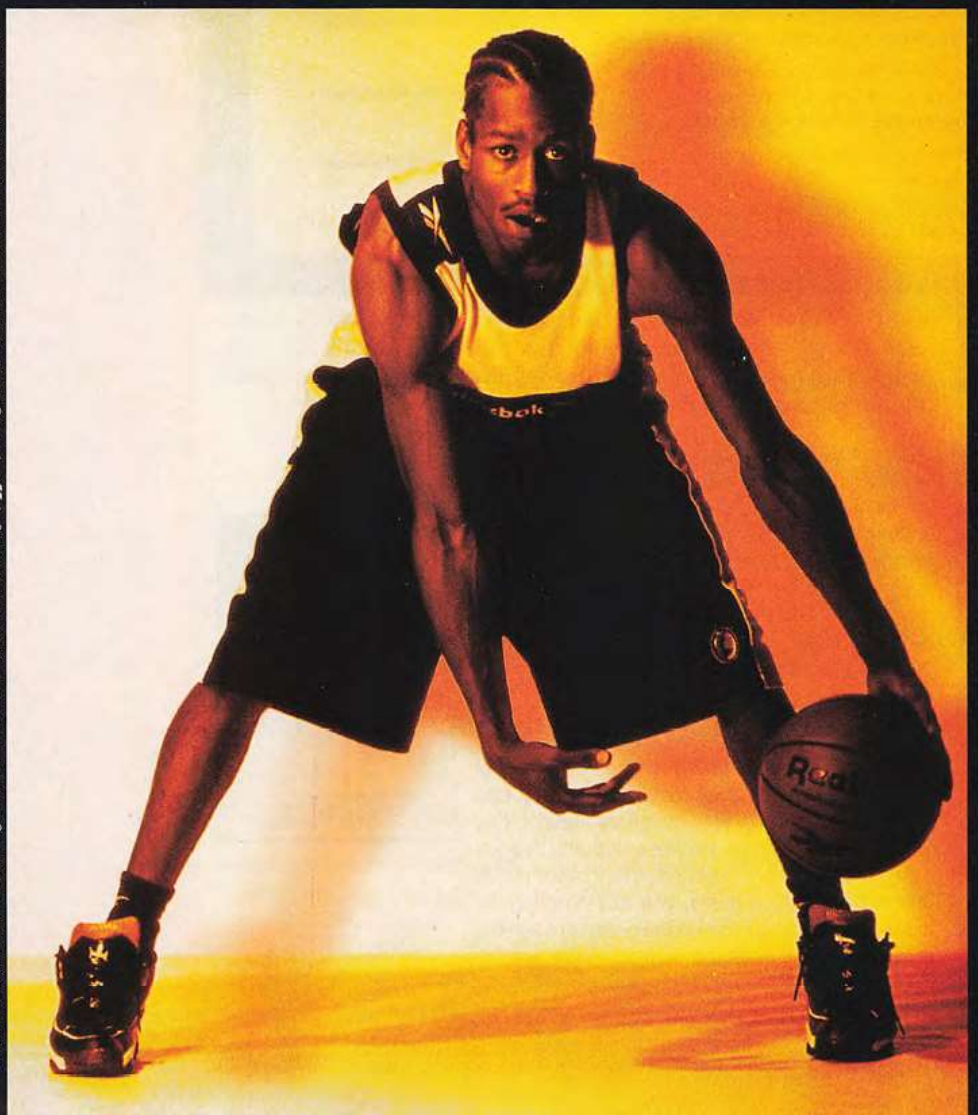

BLINK AND I WILL CATCH YOU SLEEPIN'.

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TRADING CARDS GET YOU CLOSER TO THE GAME.

YOU THINK YOU KNOW IT ALL?

Every NBA player has a story to tell, some of them have stories they don't want to tell. You'll always find something interesting on the back of Topps Basketball cards. Can you match the fun fact with the player?

1. Was a member of the French Drama Club at Georgetown.	Horace Grant
2. Filmed the movie "My Giant" with Billy Crystal	Todd Day
3. He wears new sneakers each game, because he's superstitious.	Damon Stoudamire
4. He shares the Celtic record for the most points in a quarter with Hall of Famer and Indiana Pacer coach Larry Bird.	Dikembe Mutombo
5. Loves to iron his clothes for hours at a time.	Gheorghe Muresan

1. Dikembe Mutombo 2. George Muresan 3. Horace Grant 4. Todd Day 5. Damon Stoudamire

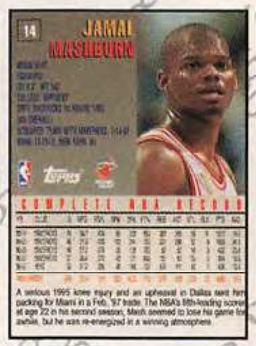
CAN YOU HANDLE THIS MUCH INFORMATION?

If you crave info about the stars in the NBA, one of the best sources of information can be right in the palm of your hand. If you don't know already, basketball cards are jam-packed with facts, figures, and photos that you can't find anywhere else. Real basketball fans and collectors know that Topps, the coolest card company on the planet, puts out one of the most comprehensive basketball cards available. All the top stars of the NBA can be found, in all their glory, in two series of Topps cards. The photography is astounding; both in-action on the front, and up close on the back. Plus Topps is the card where you can find a player's complete NBA career record. Collecting your favorite team, or players, gives you instant access to their numbers and a statistical snapshot of their careers. Which player on your favorite team is the best bet from the 3-point line? Who do you want on the foul line with the game on the line? Topps cards also give you insights to the players that you may not have known. (Did you know Milwaukee Buck Ray Allen lived in California, England and Germany as a kid, and is a really tough ping-pong player?) Collecting Topps basketball cards gives you the added awareness that helps you get closer to the players and the game you love!

INSIDE THE #'S

Getting the most out of the backs of your trading cards starts with understanding the calculations behind the statistics and what they indicate. The math is relatively easy, it's what the numbers say that can give you the inside story.

MPG IS MINUTES PER GAME - this can help indicate whether a player is a starter or comes into the game off the bench. A regulation game is 48 minutes long, and most starters play over 30 minutes. Jamal Mashburn, who was traded mid-season from the Mavs to the Heat, upped his playing time from 24.4 mpg with Dallas to 37.2 mpg with the Heat. Jamal helped Miami during the second half of last season with his increase in courtime.



REBOUNDS, STEALS, BLOCKS, ASSISTS - can help you gauge the team leaders in these key areas of the game. How do they match up against one another and how do they match up against their competition? Dennis Rodman led the league last year with 16.1 rebounds per game. If you average over 10 a game, you can definitely be considered a top-ten man in the paint! (In 1960-61, Wilt Chamberlain set the all-time single season record with over 27 rebounds per game!)

IF YOU WERE ANY MORE INSIDE YOU'D BE CALLED FOR 3 SECONDS.

You want the players. The stats. The inside information no one else has. You've come to the right place. 1997-98 Topps Basketball cards. We'll tell you everything you want to know about your favorite players. We also give you the dynamic insert cards you've come to expect from Topps, along with some brand new ones. There's a new year of *Season's Best* and *NBA Draft Redemption* cards. Plus all new Finest Die-cut *Rock Stars*, *Topps 40*, hobby-only *Bound for Glory*, and retail-only *Fantastic 15*. And for the first time ever, the Topps exclusive *Minted in Springfield* parallel set. (These cards are actually foil-stamped at the Basketball Hall of Fame.) Plus hobby-only *Autographed* cards from some of the league's biggest stars. Hey, if you wanna get into the paint, you gotta get into the cards. Topps Basketball cards.

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Own The Game.

Like Kemp, Baker makes life difficult for Sonics opponents.

STEVE WOLTMANN/NBA PHOTOS

Starting Over

Vin Baker is no Shawn Kemp. For Seattle, that might be good.

THERE IT WAS, SPLASHED ACROSS THE side of a downtown building near Pike Place Market, the popular tourist site. The mural of the Seattle favorite and star power forward was hard to miss. The Sonics' Vin Baker might have been startled to see that it wasn't him on the wall, but Shawn Kemp, the player he came to replace. The larger-than-life portrait, courtesy of Reebok, was a shocking reminder to Baker of the huge shoes he must fill.

JEFF REINKING/NBA PHOTOS

Less than two years ago, the Sonics were just two victories away from an NBA championship. Back then, Kemp and teammate Gary Payton seemed secure as one of the league's dominant hoops duos. Payton the igniter and Kemp the finisher — hip and hop. They'd bust an alley-oop on opponents so fast, you needed to keep your finger on the rewind button just to appreciate their exploits. Fans in the Pacific Northwest expected the Reign to last a long time.

BY GLENN NELSON

Starting

"Shawn is more power; Vin is more finesse," Payton says. "But both of

Baker understands this. He knows of the magic that existed between Kemp and Payton. And he's aware of the special place Kemp had in the hearts of Sonics fans. Yet as he flew west last October to take Kemp's place (Kemp, following a season-long funk, was shipped to Cleveland and the Cavaliers' Terrell Brandon went to Milwaukee as part of the three-team deal), Baker felt hopeful. On the flight from Milwaukee to Seattle, people recognized him. More than that, they welcomed him. Enthusiastically.

"They were so excited about me coming to Seattle," Baker says. "It was heartwarming. And it's happened every day since."

SO HAVE THE COMPARISONS WITH Kemp. Though they play the same position — power forward — their approaches couldn't be more different. If they were cars, Kemp, 28, would be a flashy Ferrari. Baker, 26, would be a Honda — reliable and economical.

Kemp's game is like aerial ballet. A former teammate, the Nets' Michael Cage, once called him the "Michael Jordan of the West." But Kemp's play often emphasizes style over substance. Though he can be spectacular, he can be erratic, too.

Baker's game — figuratively and literally — is more grounded. Where the 6-foot-10 Kemp might use his baseline spin to cut loose for a jam, the 6-foot-11 Baker relies on one of the game's truest turnaround jump shots. What Baker lacks in explosiveness, he makes up for with quiet dependability.

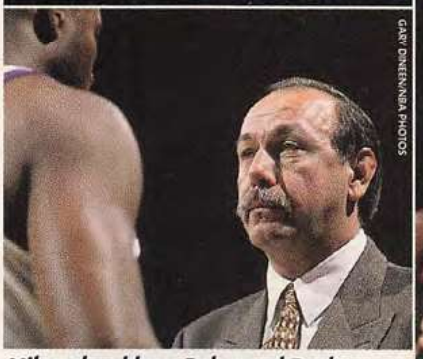
"Shawn is more power, and Vin is more finesse," Payton says. "But both of them can go out and get you 20 points and 10 rebounds every night."

But the key difference between the two is in their proven abilities to win. Kemp, a five-time All-Star in his eight Seattle seasons, helped lead the Sonics to more victories over the last five seasons than any other NBA team but Chicago. During Kemp's tenure, Seattle won three Pacific Division titles and reached the Western Conference Finals twice and the NBA Finals once.

For Baker, winning has been more elusive. Though he's a three-time All-Star — and last season became the first Buck to average at least 20 points and 10 rebounds per game since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

Baker won't find the West as rough and tumble as it was back East.



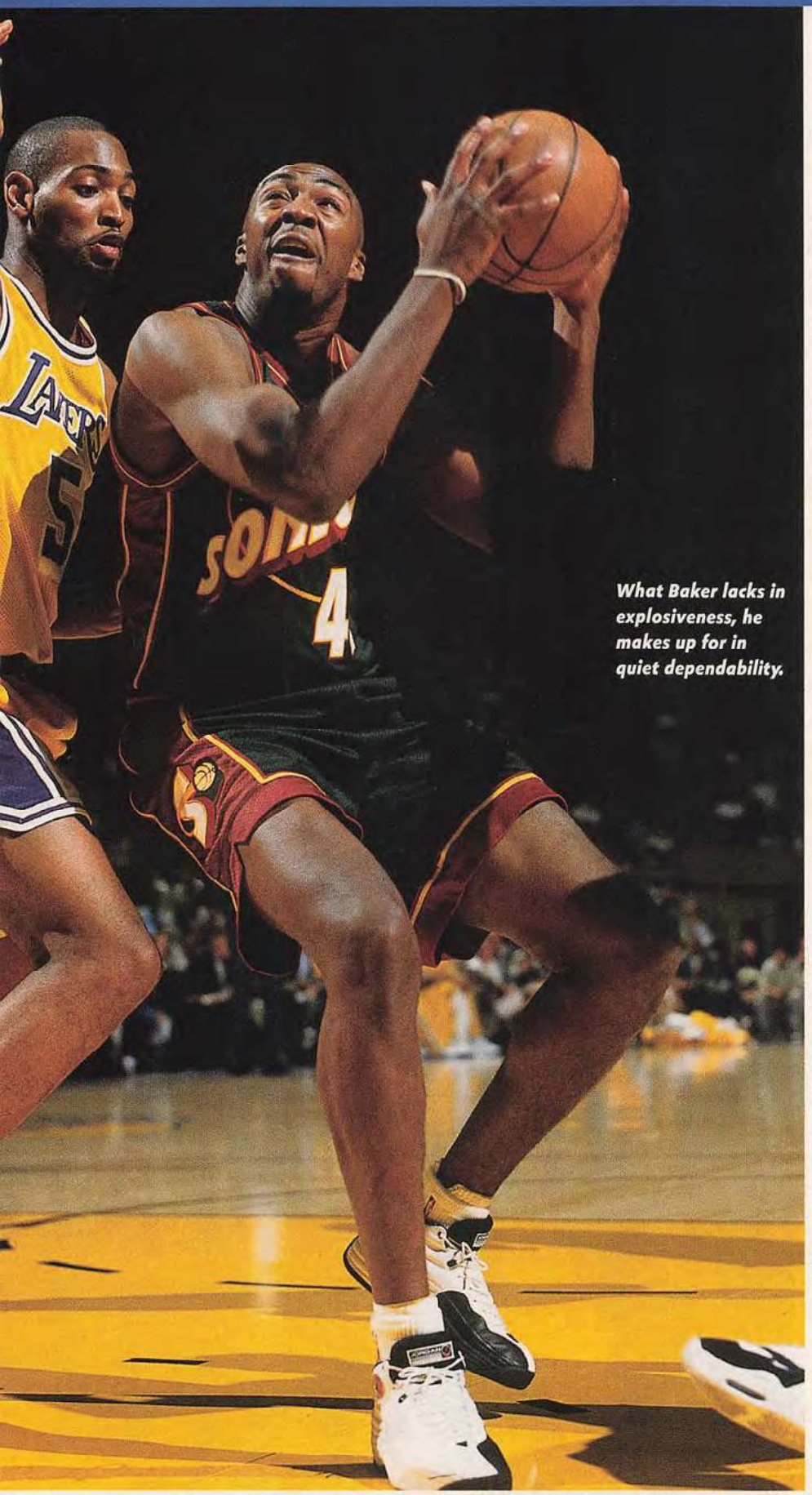
GARY DINEEN/NBA PHOTOS

Milwaukee blues: Baker and Ford, above, didn't always see eye to eye; with Robinson: many points, few wins.

RON HOSKINS/NBA PHOTOS

SOLOMON KENDAVIS/NBAE

them can go out and get you 20 points and 10 rebounds every night."



What Baker lacks in explosiveness, he makes up for in quiet dependability.

1974 — he has never played a single NBA postseason game.

The Bucks' best record with Baker was 34-48. His University of Hartford team had only one winning season during his four years there.

"My accolades have kind of worked against me," says Baker, who was the eighth pick overall in the 1993 NBA Draft. "I never asked to be an All-Star, and that's not my goal. My goal is to be on a winning team. [The criticism] is not going to go away until I [play on one]."

LAST SEASON, CRITICISM HUNG OVER Baker like a dark cloud. He and Milwaukee's Glenn Robinson had developed into one of the league's finest forward tandems, but the two lacked support from the perimeter. That changed, along with the team's expectations, when the Bucks traded for sharp-shooting rookie guard Ray Allen in 1996.

When Milwaukee kept losing, Baker started getting blamed for the Bucks' problems. Despite being recognized as one of the league's more congenial players, Baker got into a well-publicized fight last season with then-Bucks reserve center Acie Earl in the lobby of the team's hotel in Portland. Earl later said the fight "was nothing major. It just happened [to be in] a public place."

Later, Baker and Milwaukee coach Chris Ford argued in the locker room in Dallas following a win. The media found out about it. "The situation between Chris and me was really blown out of proportion," Baker says, adding that they patched things up two days after the incident. "[We] both wanted to win. For people who wear their hearts on their sleeves, it's tough. Our disagreements weren't about my attitude. It was just, at times, I would get frustrated at the losing."

The Bucks finished with 33 victories last season, improving by eight games but missing the playoffs for the fourth time in Baker's four years with the team. Baker believes he was made a scapegoat by an organization desperate to explain its failings.

The Bucks, however, were willing to unload Baker because they feared they would have lost him to free agency after the 1998-99 season. But Baker claims he never told the team he intended to leave.

"Being an All-Star is not my goal," Baker says. "My goal is to be on

He says the Bucks made "a calculated assumption" that he wouldn't return.

PORTLAND COACH MIKE DUNLEAVY, who drafted Baker when he coached Milwaukee, is among those who believe Baker was misperceived last season.

"I don't agree with those things," says Dunleavy of reports that Baker posed an attitude problem in Milwaukee. "He's an emotional type of player. A couple of times with me, he blew up a little. When it happened, it was over quickly. Frustration sets in when you're not winning."

Dunleavy believes Baker will benefit from Seattle's veteran team. With the Bucks, Baker, Robinson and Allen formed a talented core. But they were as inexperienced as their supporting cast. That's where the difference between the Sonics and Bucks is most striking.

"In Seattle, I'm surrounded by people who understand what it takes [to win]," Baker says. "[My] teammates put pressure on each other to perform, more than seeking it from the coach. We respect the coaching staff, but we know as individuals that we have to step up.

"In Milwaukee, we let a lot of things ride. People were afraid of stepping on toes. Who was I to say something to [someone when] I hadn't been there myself?"

"There" is the playoffs, the Finals. And with Seattle, Baker expects to get where he has always wanted to go. Sonics coach George Karl expects the same. Karl — who made Baker a co-captain, along with Payton — plans to take advantage of Baker's passing skills, both on the blocks and from the high post. He says Baker already has proven more adept than Kemp at passing out of double teams. That's a bonus on a club that has added Dale Ellis, the league's most prolific three-point shooter ever, to the already formidable perimeter crew of Hersey Hawkins, Sam Perkins and Detlef Schrempf.

Karl also wants to rev up the already fast-paced Sonics and run even more. When Kemp was at his best, he outran defenders upcourt and got the ball in situations that the Sonics call "earlies." An early gives the shooter the advantage because the defense hasn't yet fully formed.

Baker will take flight in the wild, wild West.

ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS

a winning team. The criticism won't go away until I play on one."

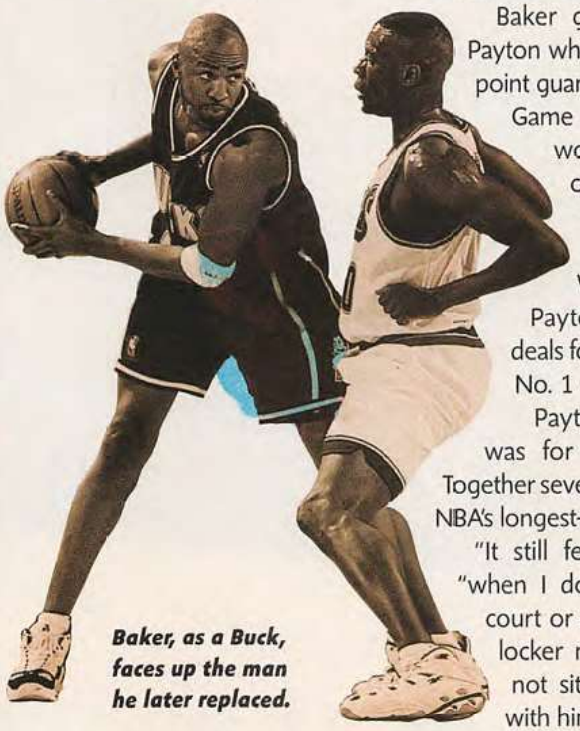
JEFF BRINKMAN/NBA PHOTOS (3)

With his "buddy" Kemp gone, Payton is now Seattle's main man.

When Kemp started sulking last season, he stopped running. Karl said he felt "blackmailed" into making up for Kemp's resulting drop in earlies by calling more set plays for him. That took opportunities away from teammates. Baker won't quit like that. Karl and the Sonics are just anxious for him to take off.

"He's not used to running yet," Payton says of Baker. "He's used to that Eastern [Conference] style of ball, where they hit each other and get a lot of calls. Out here, they just let us play."

Baker's biggest adjustment will be meshing with Payton, who is clearly the Sonics' main man now. Baker says it's his personality to want the ball with a game on the line. But he also says he recognizes when a teammate is better suited to the task.



Baker, as a Buck, faces up the man he later replaced.

Baker got on the fast track with Payton when he sought out the Sonics' point guard at last season's NBA All-Star Game to compliment him on his work ethic. The two also spent considerable time together during a Nike-sponsored tour of Europe last summer. When the Sonics asked Payton for input on proposed deals for Kemp, he listed Baker as his No. 1 choice.

Payton's preference, of course, was for Kemp to stay in Seattle. Together seven years, they were one of the NBA's longest-running shows.

"It still feels funny," Payton admits, "when I don't see Shawn out on the court or see his jersey hanging in the locker next to mine, or [when] I'm not sitting in the back of the bus with him. He's my buddy."

From the day he arrived, Baker has felt welcome in Seattle.

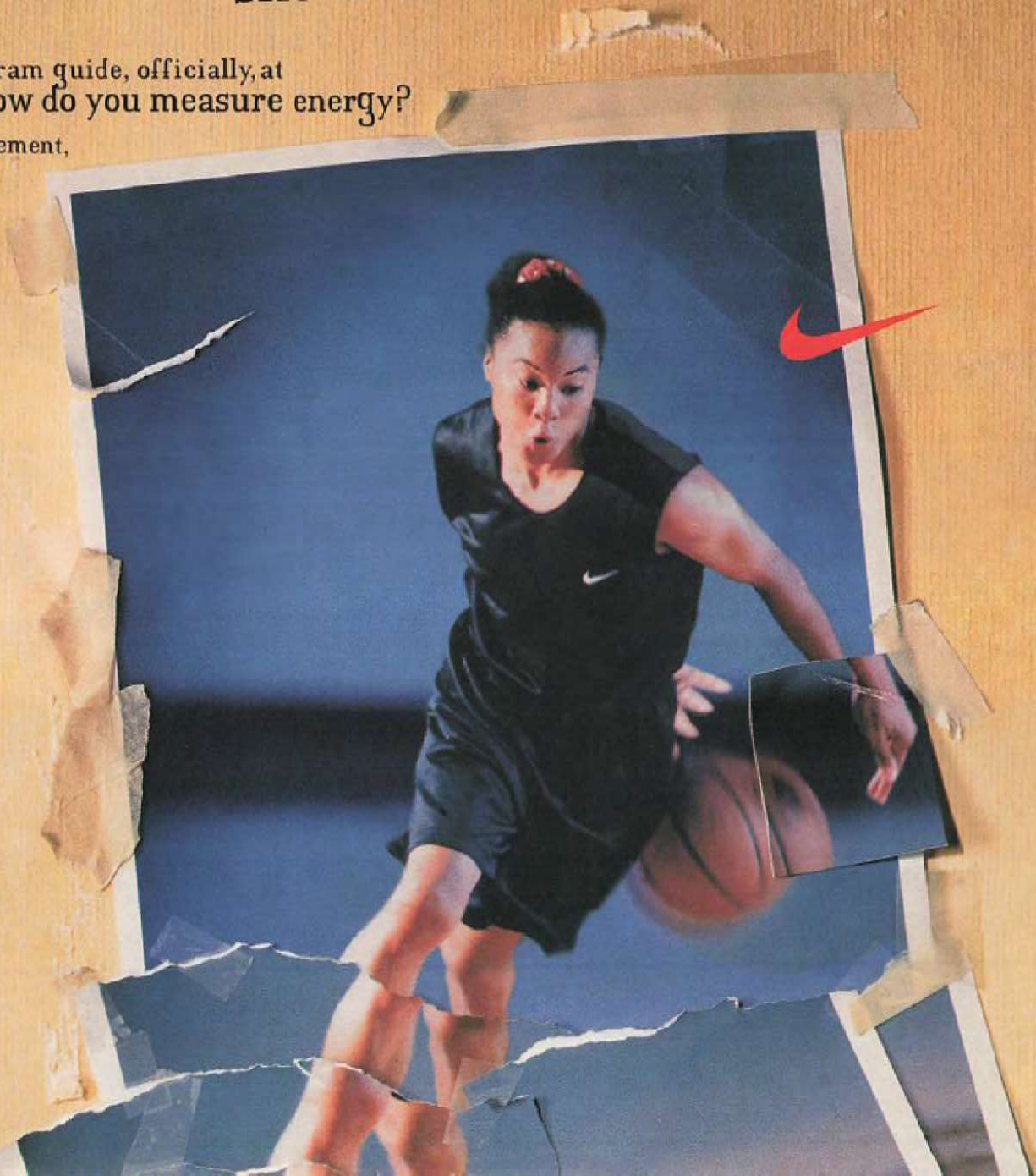
One week into the season, plans were being made to remove Kemp's mural from the building downtown. It's a symbolic end to an era. Baker understands that for Payton and Sonics fans, the breakup with Kemp was painful. But he's hoping that he and Payton will forge a powerful relationship of their own, with Baker benefiting from Payton's dazzling passes. Will the two make it work? With time, Baker hopes. He's anxious for the victories to come. Preferably four of them in the NBA Finals. ■

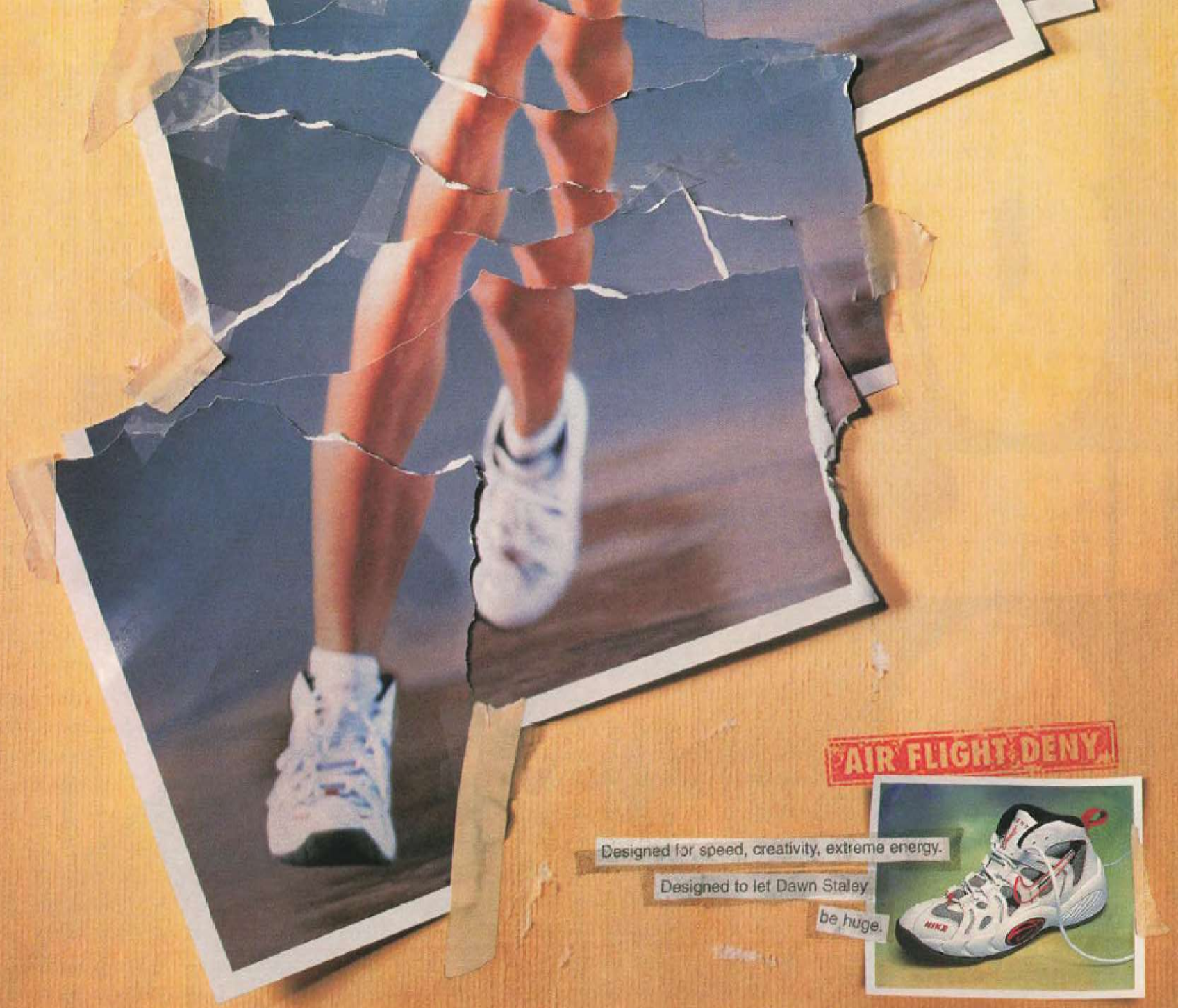
Dawn Staley is a giant, she is *EIGHT FEET* tall.

She is listed in your program guide, officially, at five feet six inches. But how do you measure energy?

She deserves a new unit of measurement, a new mathematics, sensitive enough to record the expansion that happens in the heat of the game, when what matters is the **size of your** passion.

Everything about her is outsized: her heart, her creativity, her appetite for the game. And she grows with every no-look pass, every surge past a defender, every steal from a daydreaming point guard.

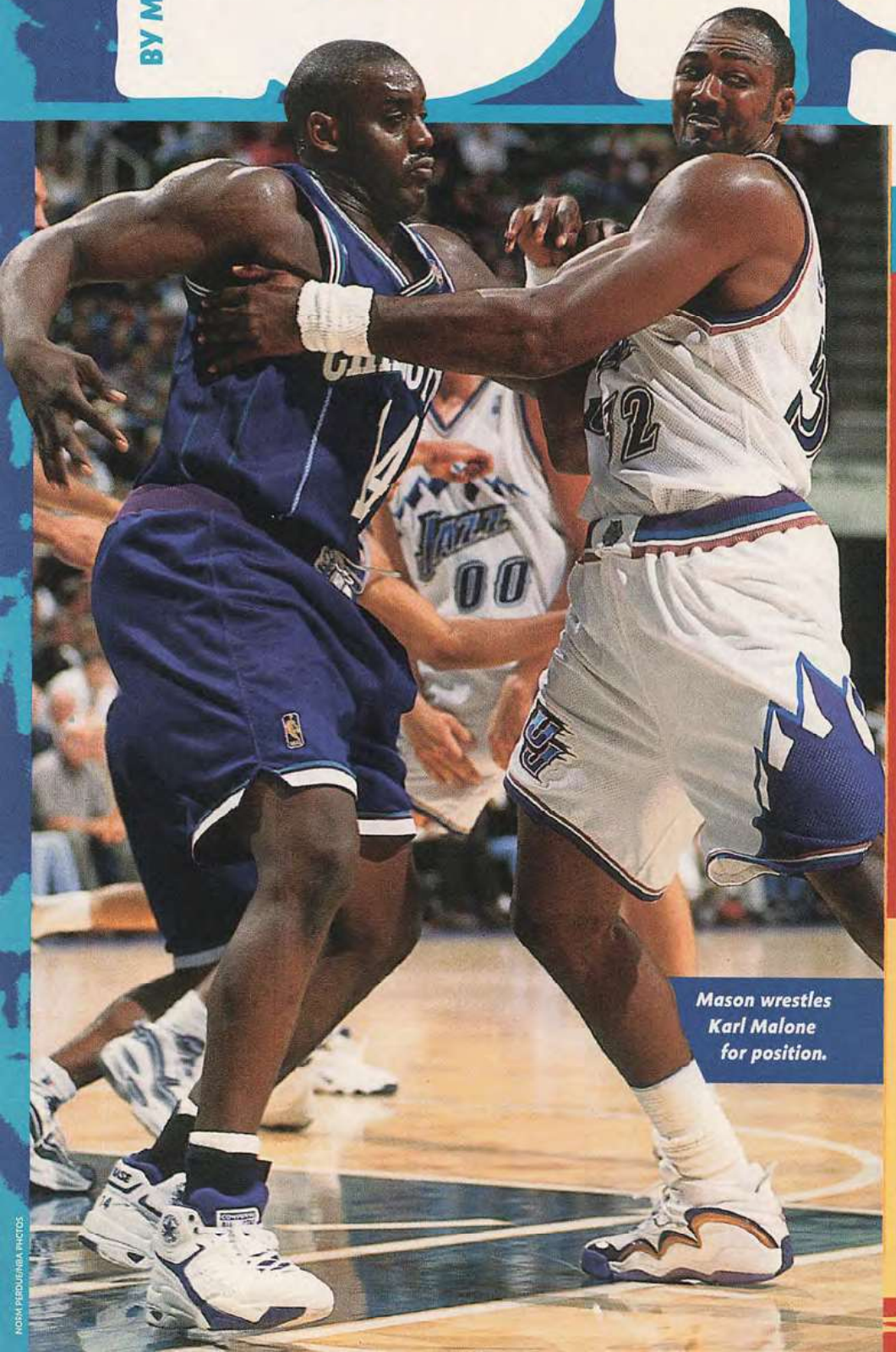




Dawn Staley **does not boast,** but she will say: "I play like I'm 8 feet tall." Dawn Staley is eight feet tall, and **she is still growing.**

LITTLE big men

BY MARTY BURNS



Mason wrestles Karl Malone for position.

NORM PERDUENBA PHOTOS

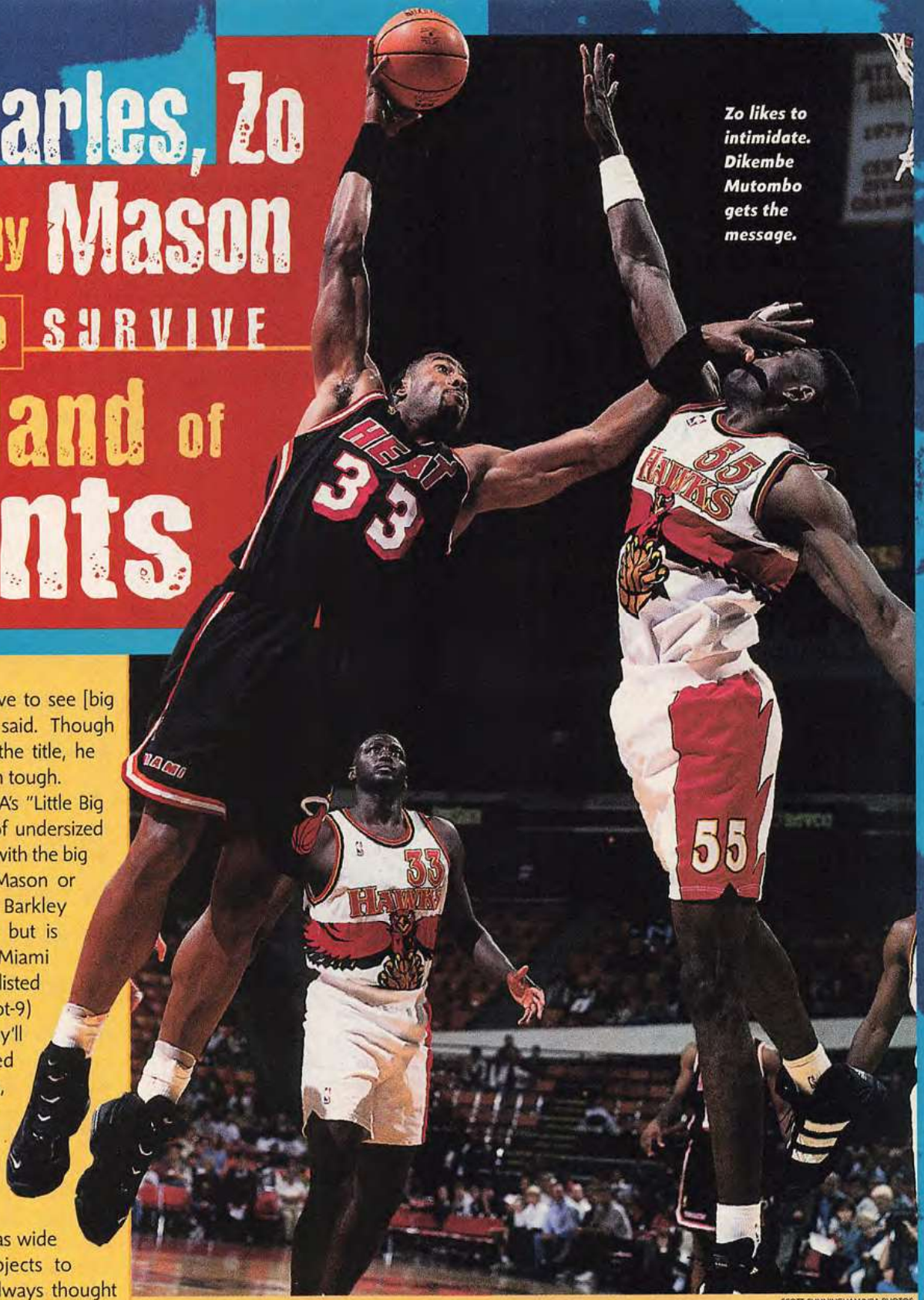
HAKEEM OLAJUWON WAS beside himself. After the first three games of the 1994 NBA Finals against New York, these were the Houston center's total fourth-quarter scoring stats: two field goals and 13 points. Worse, it was Knicks forward Anthony Mason who had kept him in check.

Mason, a 6-foot-7, 250-pound bench player, is 5 inches shorter than Olajuwon.

"Mason," the league's MVP told reporters sarcastically, "is definitely the greatest defensive player in the NBA. I will give him my Defensive Player of the Year trophy."

Mason loved seeing Olajuwon squirm. For three games, he had put his body to the big center, forcing him away from the basket, taking away his baseline jumper

Sir Charles, Zo & Anthony Mason on how to SURVIVE in the land of giants



Zo likes to intimidate. Dikembe Mutombo gets the message.

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

and drop-step move. "I love to see [big men] frustrated," Mason said. Though Houston went on to win the title, he continued to play Olajuwon tough.

Mason is one of the NBA's "Little Big Men" — a select group of undersized players who can match up with the big bodies in the paint. Ask Mason or players such as Charles Barkley (who is listed at 6-foot-6 but is 2 inches shorter) and Miami center Alonzo Mourning (listed at 6-foot-10 but really 6-foot-9) how they succeed, and they'll look at you hard-eyed and snap: through heart, brains, hard work, broad-shouldered bulk — and a healthy dose of attitude. "I don't buy that undersized stuff," says Barkley, who, like Mase and Zo, is as wide as a refrigerator and objects to being called small. "I've always thought that was a crock."

The three had to develop big inside games to survive, and that wasn't easy. Mason, in fact, never played power forward until he reached the NBA.

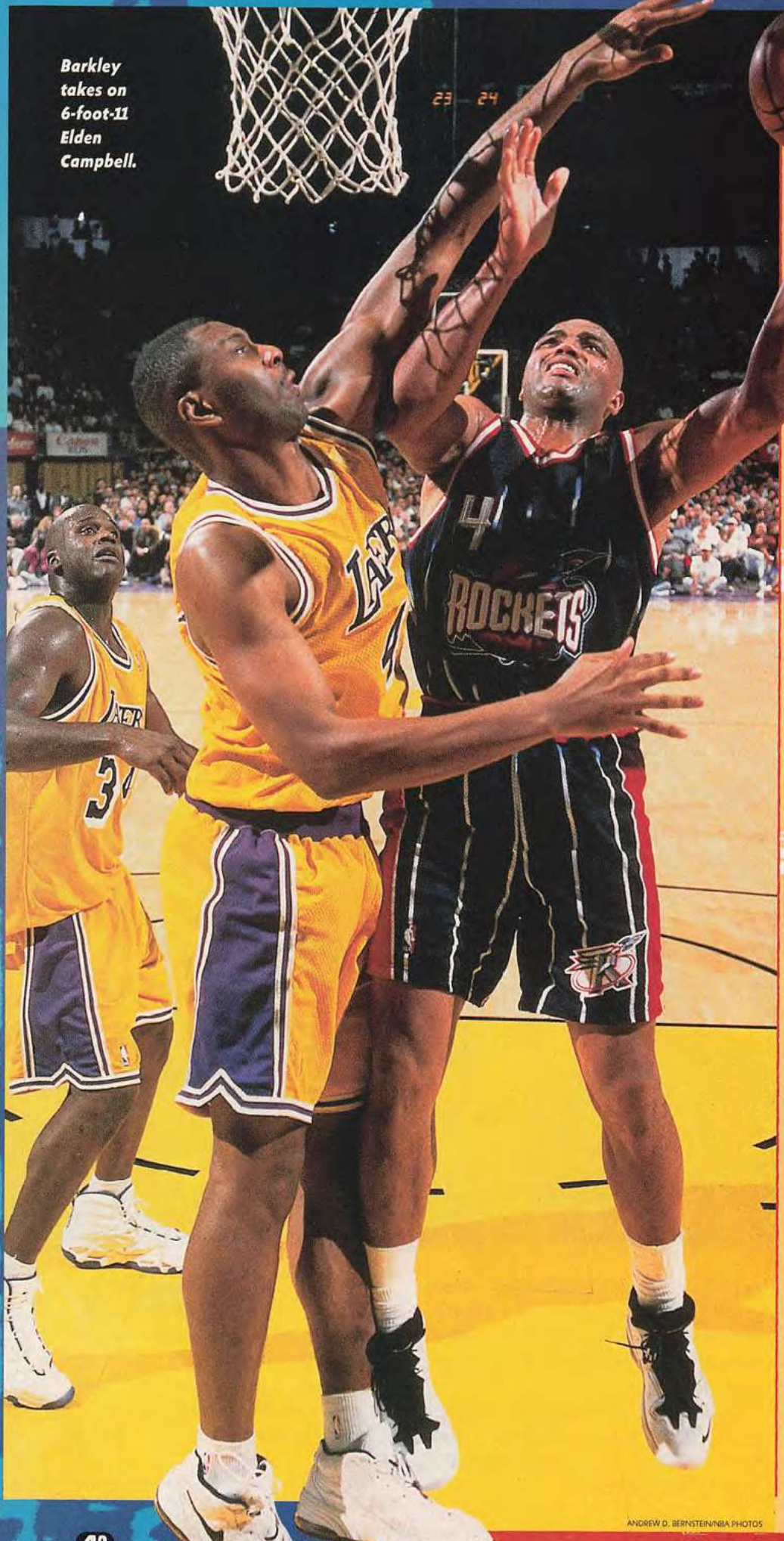
The key, says Charlotte coach Dave Cowens, who coaches Mason and who was once league MVP as an undersized 6-foot-9 center with Boston, is "knowing your opponent's limitations. It's almost like a chess match [down low]. It all depends on matchups and what the strengths and weaknesses of the other person are. You have to utilize your quickness against his size."

Zo, Sir Charles and Mase had to learn a few secrets in order to survive — and thrive — in the low post. Here's how they describe their games.

ALONZO mourning

"[I USE] HUSTLE AND ATHLETIC ABILITY to make up the difference [my opponents have] in height. I'm fortunate that I have long arms and that I can jump, so I'm able to make up for those 2 or 3 inches that I lack.

"[Basically,] I try to outrun my



Barkley takes on 6-foot-11 Elden Campbell.

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

opponents. I'm a whole lot quicker than most of the centers I play against. Take Shaq. He's so big that when he bumps you, you've got to give space. So I try to go around [big centers like him] instead of trying to go over 'em.

"I just need a step to get my shot off. People think that I post up the whole game. I would say that 90 percent of my baskets are with an outside dribble. I have to use my brain to make up for my [lack of] height, especially as I get older.

"I use intimidation, too. You can smell it when you're getting to a certain player. That's when you're starting to take his confidence away."

CHARLES barkley

"IF YOU GET THE BALL ON THE BOX AND THEY don't double-team, you're supposed to score. I'll use a head fake, maybe try to go under a defender. If he takes the fake, you're either going to get fouled or get to the basket or both. If the defense is all over you, you gotta find somebody who is open. Get [the other team] scrambling, then get ready for an offensive rebound."

ANTHONY mason

"YOU HAVE TO PLAY TO YOUR ADVANTAGES. For me, that's strength and conditioning. If you're strong enough, you can get under [the big guys] and move them off the ball. You want to make them shoot from farther out than they're used to. Also, if you make them run and bang on them in the post and bother them, maybe they'll get tired in the fourth quarter.

"Take Shaq. You've got to harass him as much as possible, try to make him shoot over you. Everyone knows if you let him get close to the basket, he'll dunk on you.

"Then there's Hakeem. He's quick and strong, and he's crafty because he can go right or left. You've just got to put a body on him and make him pass the ball out."

MOURNING, BARKLEY AND MASON WILL TELL you that they're still perfecting their low-post games. "I'm working on a few moves now, but I'm not going to say what they are until I get them down," Mason says.

The big guys, after all, already have enough advantages.

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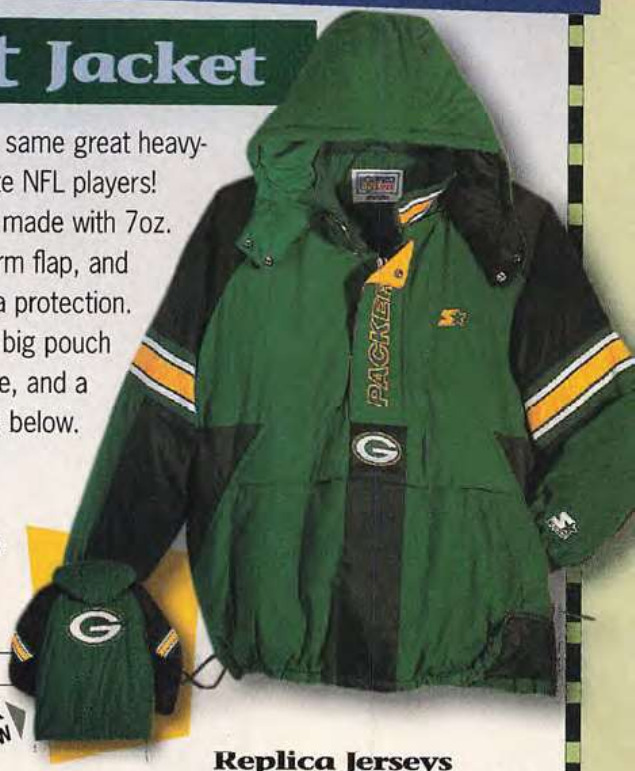

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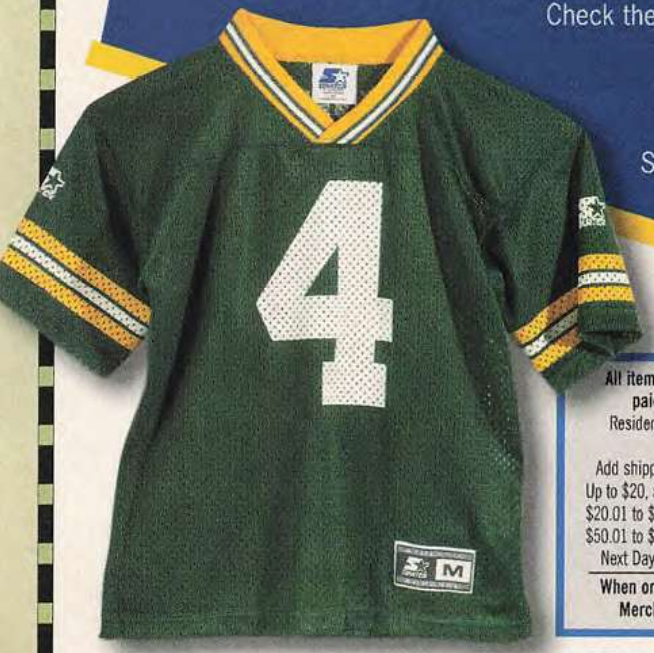

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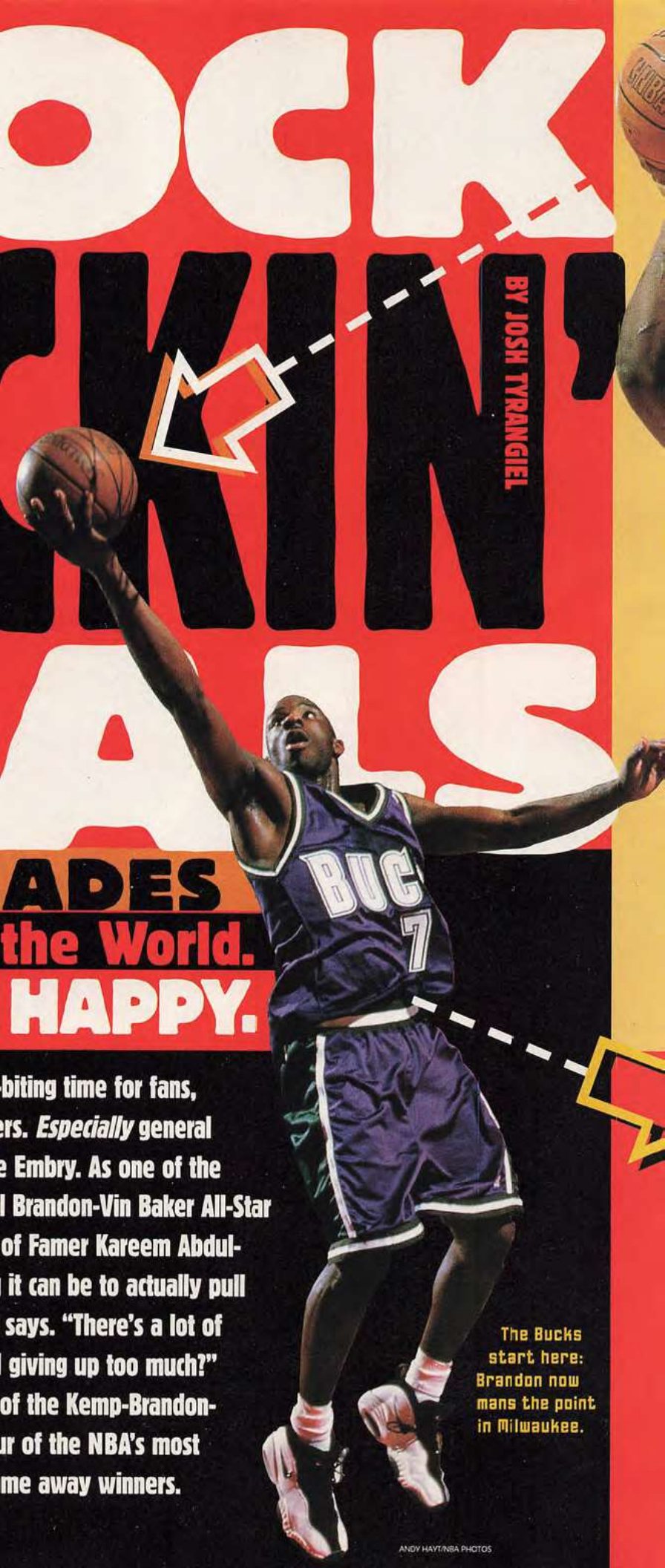
BLOCK ROCKIN' DEALS

BY JOSH TYRANGIEL

THEY WERE THE TRADES HEARD Round the World. NOT EVERY TEAM CAME AWAY HAPPY.

When teams trade superstars, it's nail-biting time for fans, players, coaches and general managers. *Especially* general managers. Just ask Cleveland's Wayne Embry. As one of the engineers of last fall's Shawn Kemp-Terrell Brandon-Vin Baker All-Star swap — and the man who once dealt Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar — Embry knows how nerve-racking it can be to actually pull the trigger. "It's emotionally draining," he says. "There's a lot of anxiety because you always wonder, am I giving up too much?"

It's too early to tell who'll get the best of the Kemp-Brandon-Baker blockbuster, but here's a look at four of the NBA's most dynamic deals ever — and which teams came away winners.

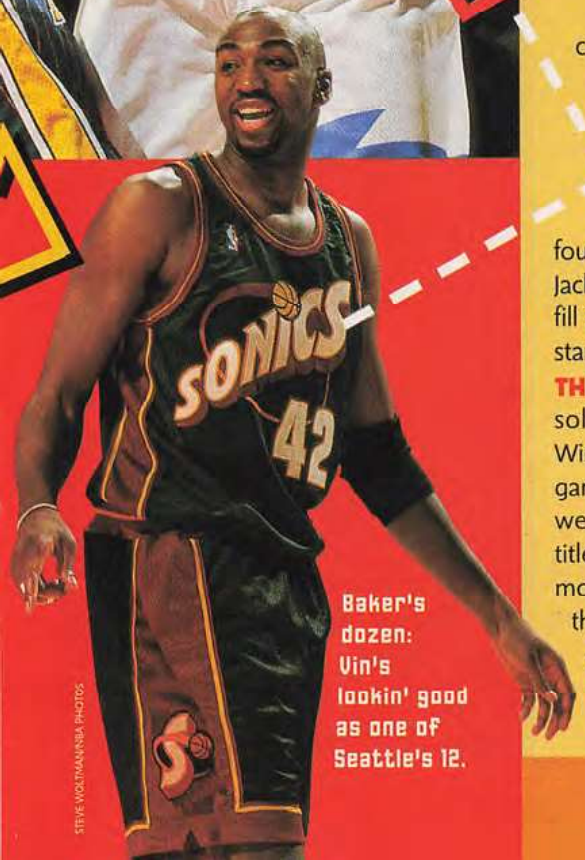


The Bucks start here: Brandon now mans the point in Milwaukee.

ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS

Kemp's cavalier attitude forced Seattle to send him to Cleveland.

GLENN JAMES/NBA PHOTOS



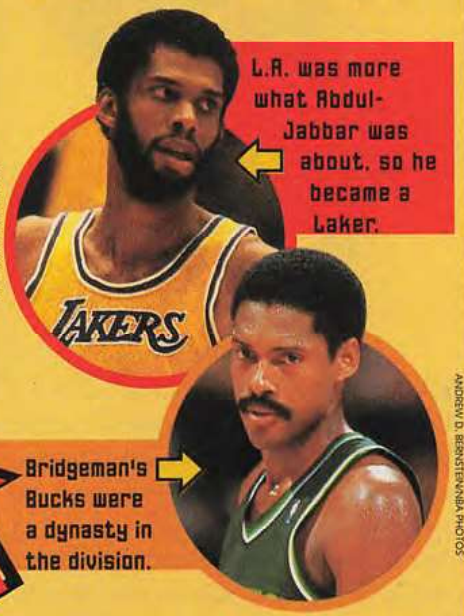
Baker's dozen: Vin's lookin' good as one of Seattle's 12.

STEVE WOLTMAN/NBA PHOTOS

June 16, 1975

THE TRADE: Milwaukee sent Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Walt Wesley to the L.A. Lakers for Elmore Smith, Brian Winters, Junior Bridgeman and David Meyers.

THE BACKGROUND: "I'm not criticizing the people here," said Abdul-Jabbar, then 28. "But Milwaukee is not what I'm all about." Although Abdul-Jabbar had led the Bucks to a championship in 1971, the 7-foot-2 center was never happy in Brewtown. So with one year left on his contract, he told Bucks management that after the 1975-76 season he planned on signing with the Knicks or Lakers, teams in cities that would better satisfy his cultural interests as well as shelter him from the round-the-clock hounding of Milwaukee's star-struck fans. Wayne Embry, then the Bucks' GM, was forced to make a deal and found a trading partner in Lakers owner Jack Kent Cooke, who was desperate to fill seats in the absence of retired superstar Jerry West.



L.A. was more what Abdul-Jabbar was about, so he became a Laker.

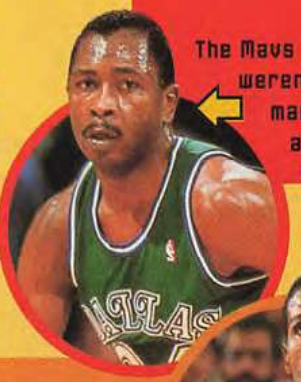
Bridgeman's Bucks were a dynasty in the division.

JIM CUMMINS/NBA PHOTOS

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

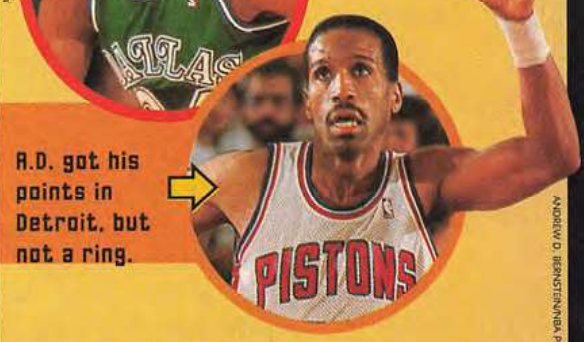
THE RESULT: Meyers proved to be a solid forward, and Bridgeman and Winters combined for over 30 points a game as the nucleus of a Bucks team that went on to win seven straight division titles. Of course, Abdul-Jabbar averaged more than 22 points by himself and won three MVP awards and five championships with the Lakers.

THE WINNER: Lakers



The Mavs weren't mad about Aguirre.

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS



A.D. got his points in Detroit, but not a ring.

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

Feb. 15, 1989

THE TRADE: Dallas sent Mark Aguirre to Detroit for Adrian Dantley (and a first-round draft pick in 1991).

THE BACKGROUND: If pro wrestling had trades, it would be hard pressed to match this epic for melodrama. Aguirre and Dantley were both high-scoring small forwards, but their personalities couldn't have been more different. The Pistons had dubbed the 32-year-old Dantley "Teacher" as a measure of respect. Aguirre, 29, was considered an out-of-shape loafer by most of his Dallas teammates. After the trade, then-Mavs forward Sam Perkins declared an "all-day party," adding for good measure, "Good luck, Detroit. You'll need it."

So why did Detroit make this deal? The versatile Aguirre gave the Bad Boys more offensive flexibility, and he was a step quicker than the aging A.D. Plus, the improved play of Dennis Rodman was already cutting into Dantley's playing time. Many even suspected that then-Pistons captain Isiah Thomas, one of Aguirre's best friends, lobbied for the trade.

THE RESULT: If Thomas, who is now the Raptors' executive vice president of basketball operations, was behind the deal, give him credit. Aguirre never won any popularity contests in Detroit, but he was a solid contributor to two Pistons championships. The Mavericks were over .500 when they traded Aguirre. They haven't been to the playoffs since 1990. Dantley was out of the league by 1991.

THE WINNER: Pistons

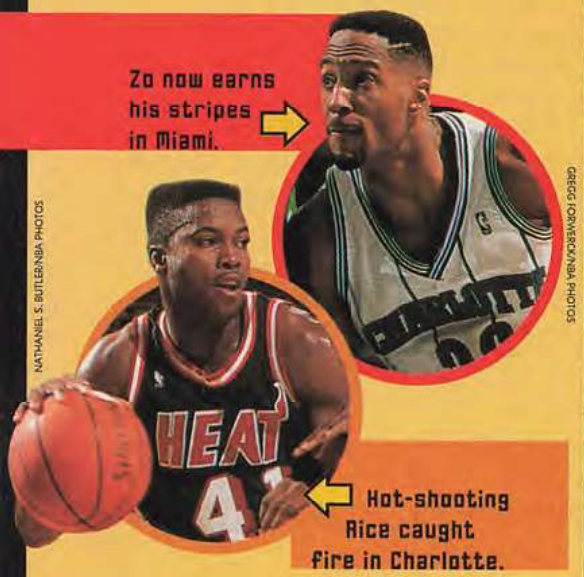
Nov. 3, 1995

THE TRADE: Charlotte sent Alonzo Mourning, Pete Myers and LeRon Ellis to Miami for Glen Rice, Khalid Reeves and Matt Geiger (and a first-round draft pick in 1996).

THE BACKGROUND: Charlotte's Mourning approached the 1995-96 season with his sights set on a lucrative new deal. Larry Johnson was already entering the third year of a huge deal, and two big-money contracts were too much for the Hornets to manage. Distracting trade talk dominated Charlotte's training camp. So before the situation turned into a season-long nightmare, Charlotte shopped Mourning and found a cautious taker in Miami's head coach and president, Pat Riley. "It wasn't very pleasant for me to have to trade Glen," Riley said when the deal was made. Since quality big men are rare, the early word was that the Hornets got fleeced. "Glen Rice is a nice player," said then-Hornet Robert Parish. "But he's no Alonzo Mourning."

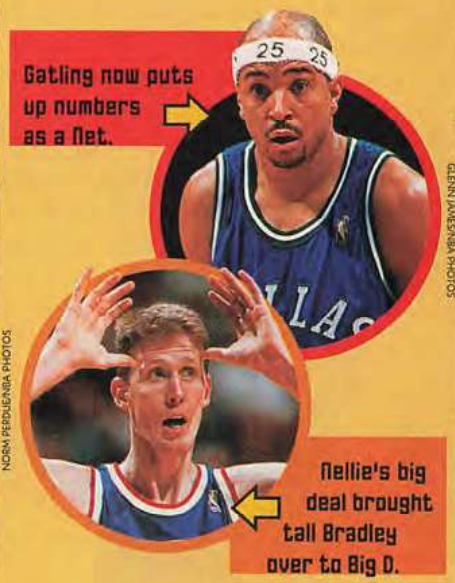
THE RESULT: Riley has since rebuilt the Heat around Mourning, and Zo's defense carried Miami to the Eastern Conference Finals in 1997. Rice, on the other hand, had a career year last season and has become one of the league's most feared offensive players. With a little more help, he's just as capable of raising a championship banner in Charlotte as Mourning is in Miami.

THE WINNER: Heat, for now



Feb. 17, 1997

THE TRADE: New Jersey sent Shawn Bradley, Robert Pack, Ed O'Bannon and Khalid Reeves to Dallas for Jim Jackson, Chris Gatling, Eric Montross, Sam Cassell and George McCloud.


Gatling now puts up numbers as a Net.
Nellie's big deal brought tall Bradley over to Big D.
NORM PERDUE/NBA PHOTOS
GLENN JAMES/NBA PHOTOS

THE BACKGROUND: Talk about being in the right place at the right time. Under the Nets' new head coach and executive vice president of basketball operations, John Calipari, the team was in the early stages of yet another rebuilding era when Don Nelson opened Dallas' barn door and let the best horses go free. Nelson had been the Mavericks' GM for only one week before initiating the NBA's biggest deal ever. "This locker room shocked me," said Nelson of Dallas' anti-chemistry. "It's not acceptable from this point on." Nelson's message was loud and clear: Time to start over.

THE RESULT: Calipari got Dallas' top four scorers without giving up any of his best players. He quickly sent McCloud to the Lakers for a first-round pick, parlayed Jackson and Montross into Keith Van Horn in another trade last summer, and got Cassell to make a long-term commitment to the Nets. Suddenly, New Jersey is a team with young legs and a deep bench. Nelson has Bradley, a player he has long coveted but who has yet to prove he can be a top-flight NBA center.

THE WINNER: Nets

10 MORE BIG DEALS

July 9, 1968: Philadelphia sent Wilt Chamberlain to the L.A. Lakers for Jerry Chambers, Archie Clark and Darrall Imhoff.

The Stilt, the three-time reigning MVP, went on to bring L.A. an NBA title in 1972. **Winner:** *Lakers*

Nov. 10, 1971: Baltimore sent Earl Monroe to New York for Mike Riordan, Dave Stallworth and cash.

The Knicks got the Pearl, a former Rookie of the Year and All-NBA guard; the following season, they won it all. **Winner:** *Knicks*

Aug. 16, 1978: Philadelphia sent George McGinnis and its No. 1 pick in 1978 (Mike Evans) to Denver for Bobby Jones and Ralph Simpson (and a first-round pick between 1980 and '84).

One year later, Denver sent the high-scoring McGinnis to Indiana. Jones, an eight-time All-Defensive First Team member, helped Philly win the 1983 championship. **Winner:** *76ers*

Sept. 15, 1982: Houston sent Moses Malone to Philadelphia for Caldwell Jones (and a first-round pick in 1983).

That season, Malone earned the MVP award (his third overall) — along with a championship ring. **Winner:** *76ers*

Oct. 22, 1982: Golden State sent Bernard King to New York for Micheal Ray Richardson (and a fifth-round pick in 1984).

Sugar Ray was a flashy, high-scoring point guard, but King was da bomb. **Winner:** *Knicks*

June 8, 1984: Portland sent Lafayette "Fat" Lever, Calvin Natt and Wayne Cooper (and a second-round pick in 1984 and a first-round pick in '85) to Denver for Kiki Vandeweghe.

Kiki could fill it up, but Fat could do it all. His 46 triple-doubles and tough defense paced Denver for the rest of the '80s. **Winner:** *Nuggets*

Sept. 29, 1984: The L.A. Clippers sent Terry Cummings, Craig Hodges and Ricky Pierce to Milwaukee for Marques Johnson, Junior Bridgeman, Harvey Catchings and cash.

Johnson and Bridgeman were past their primes. Cummings and Pierce enjoyed All-Star years in Milwaukee. **Winner:** *Bucks*

Nov. 1, 1991: Golden State sent Mitch Richmond and Les Jepsen (and a second-round pick in 1995) to Sacramento for Billy Owens.

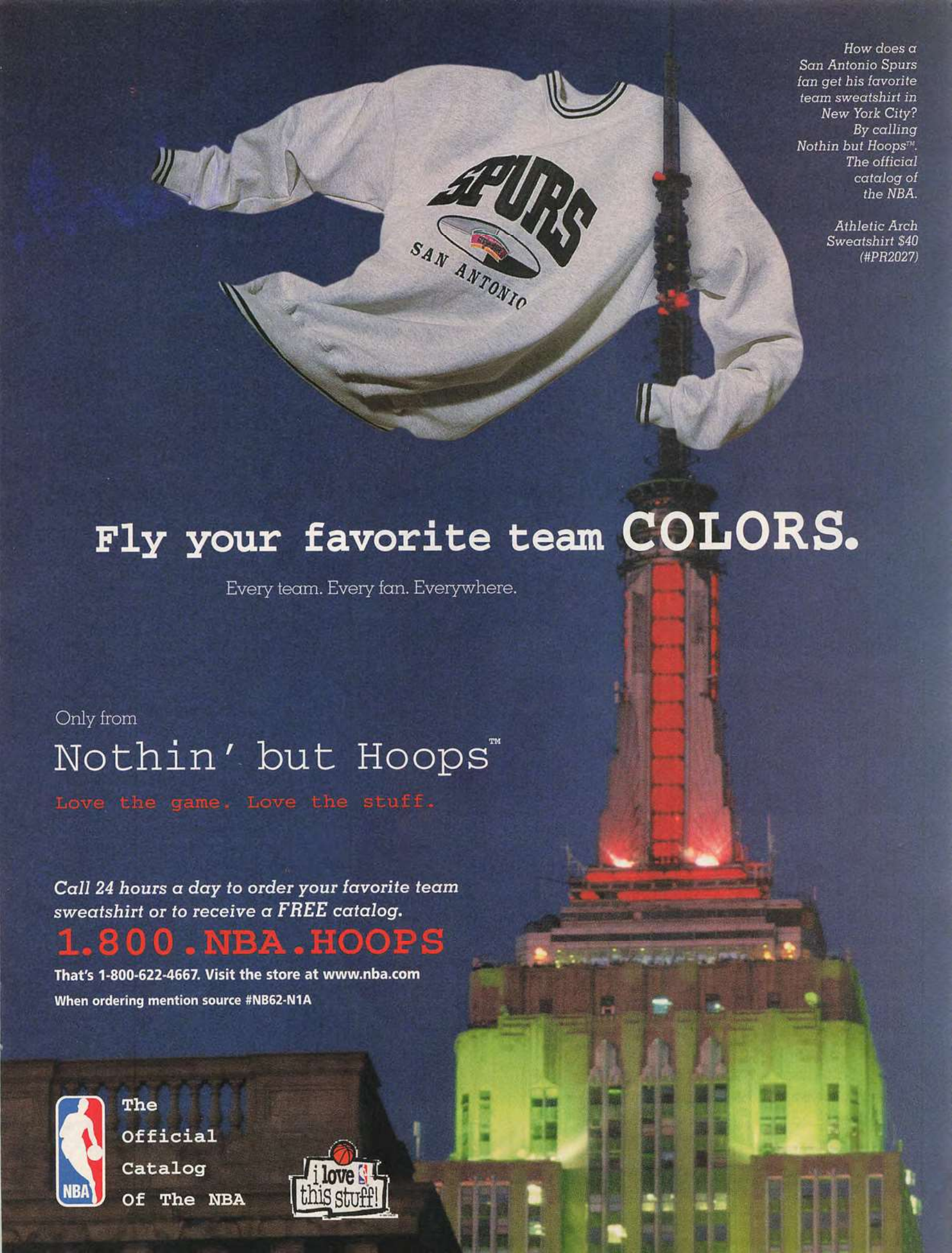
The Warriors broke up the popular Run-TMC (Tim Hardaway, Richmond and Chris Mullin) in order to get college-star Owens. **Winner:** *Kings*

June 17, 1992: Philadelphia sent Charles Barkley to Phoenix for Jeff Hornacek, Andrew Lang and Tim Perry.

Tired of losing in Philly, Sir Charles demanded this one. Horny went to Utah the next year. **Winner:** *Suns*

Nov. 17, 1994: Golden State sent Chris Webber to Washington for Tom Gugliotta (and first-round picks in 1996, 1998 and 2000).

All the Warriors have to show (so far) for losing C.Webb is Todd Fuller and Donyell Marshall. Gulp. **Winner:** *Wizards*



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Now that CYNTHIA COOPER is in the spotlight, she plans to stay there.

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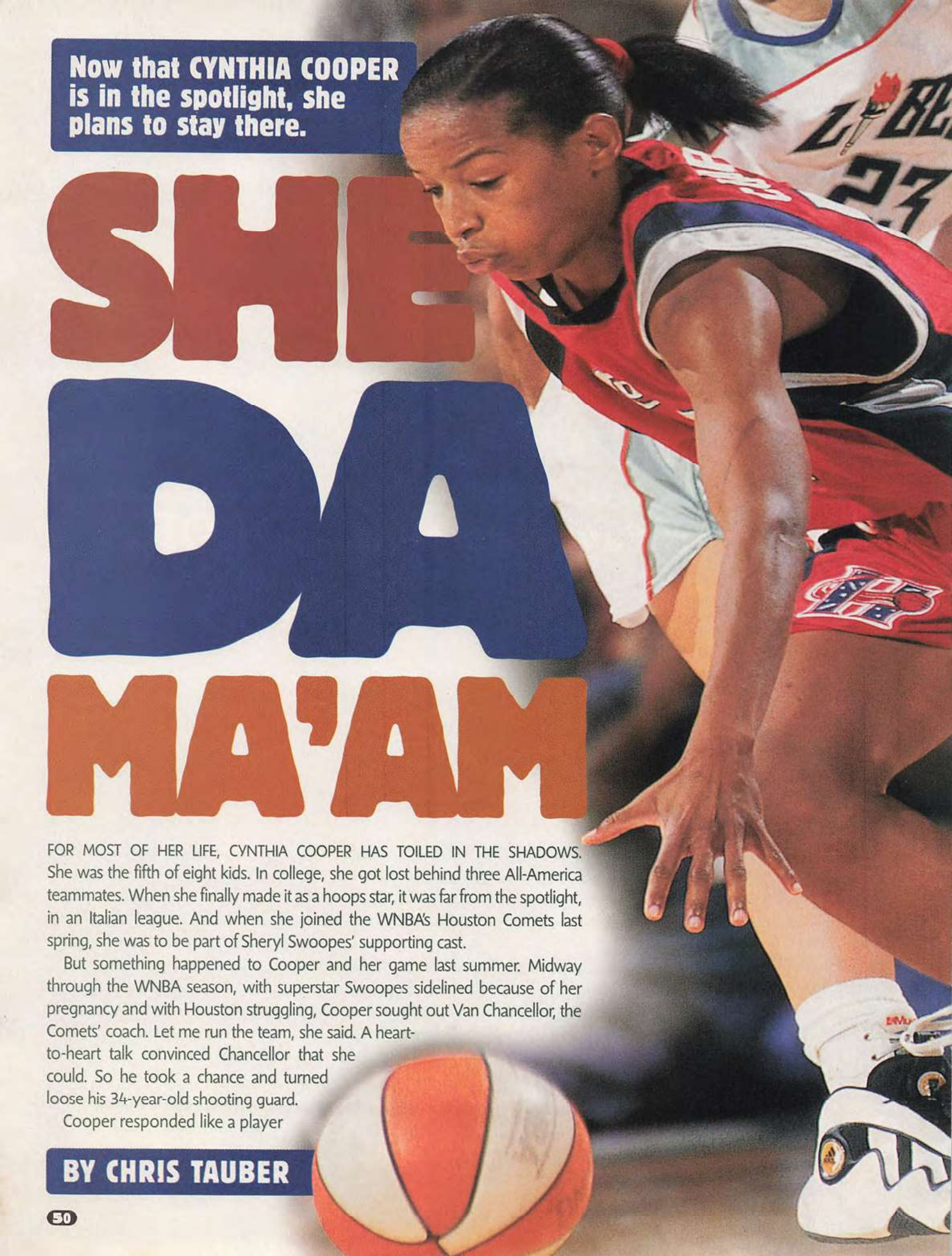
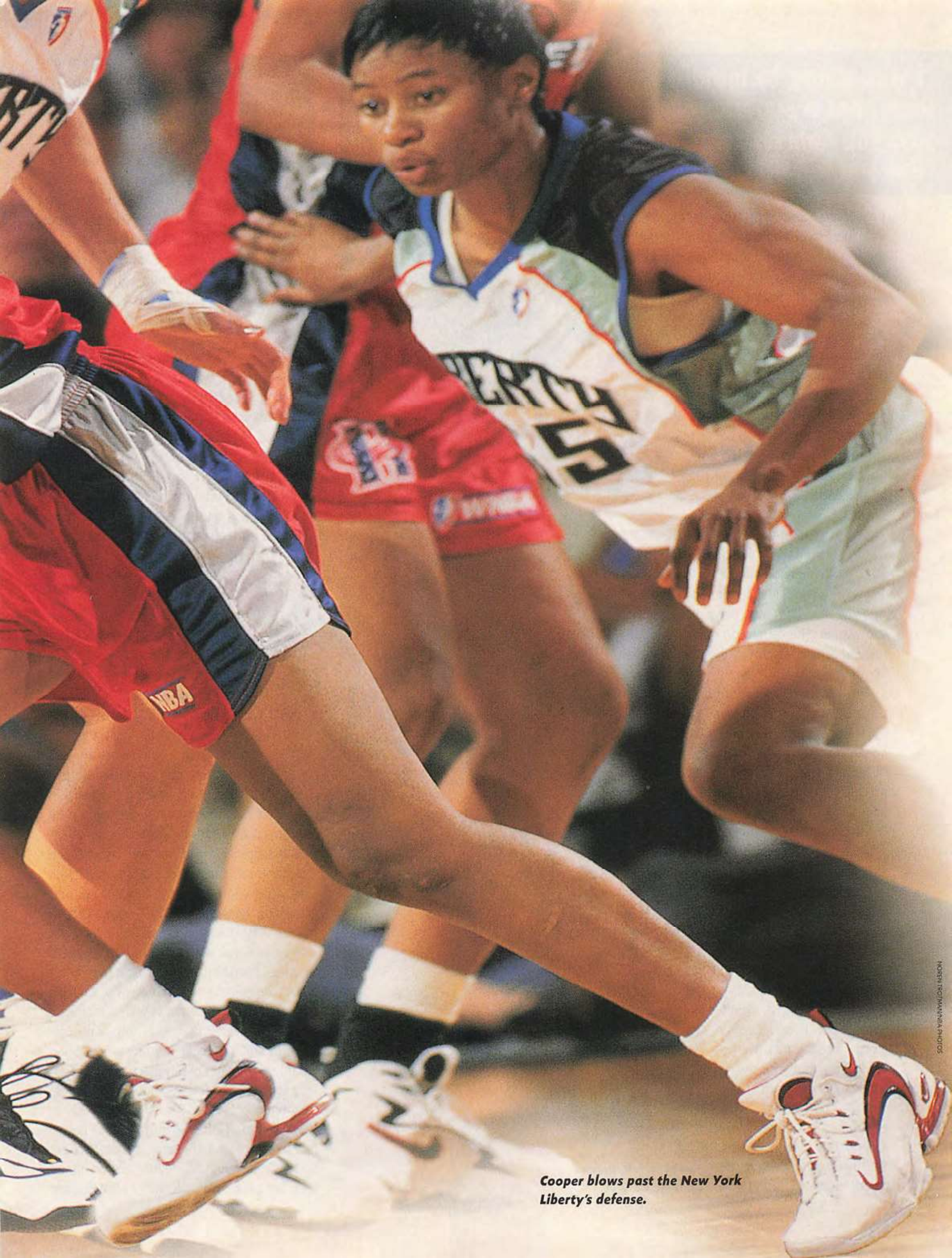


FOR MOST OF HER LIFE, CYNTHIA COOPER HAS TOILED IN THE SHADOWS. She was the fifth of eight kids. In college, she got lost behind three All-America teammates. When she finally made it as a hoops star, it was far from the spotlight, in an Italian league. And when she joined the WNBA's Houston Comets last spring, she was to be part of Sheryl Swoopes' supporting cast.

But something happened to Cooper and her game last summer. Midway through the WNBA season, with superstar Swoopes sidelined because of her pregnancy and with Houston struggling, Cooper sought out Van Chancellor, the Comets' coach. Let me run the team, she said. A heart-to-heart talk convinced Chancellor that she could. So he took a chance and turned loose his 34-year-old shooting guard.

Cooper responded like a player

BY CHRIS TAUBER



Cooper blows past the New York Liberty's defense.

SCOTCH VIAN/WNBA PHOTOS

"I was trying to mold a team, not a superstar," says the Comets coach. "But one fed off the other."

possessed. She won the season Most Valuable Player award and led the Comets to the first WNBA title. In that final game, she scored 25 points against the New York Liberty to be named the championship MVP.

A Houston fan summed up her impact. Amidst a shower of confetti, he hoisted a sign that read, "U Da Ma'am!" Afterward, Cooper sent out a message of her own: She would no longer take a backseat to anybody.

"I'm the leader on this team," Cooper said. "Next year, I'll [still] be the leader."

BASKETBALL WASN'T COOPER'S primary sport growing up. A champion hurdler at Locke High School in the Watts section of Los Angeles, she didn't start playing hoops until she was 16. She caught on quickly, though, earning a scholarship to the University of Southern California.

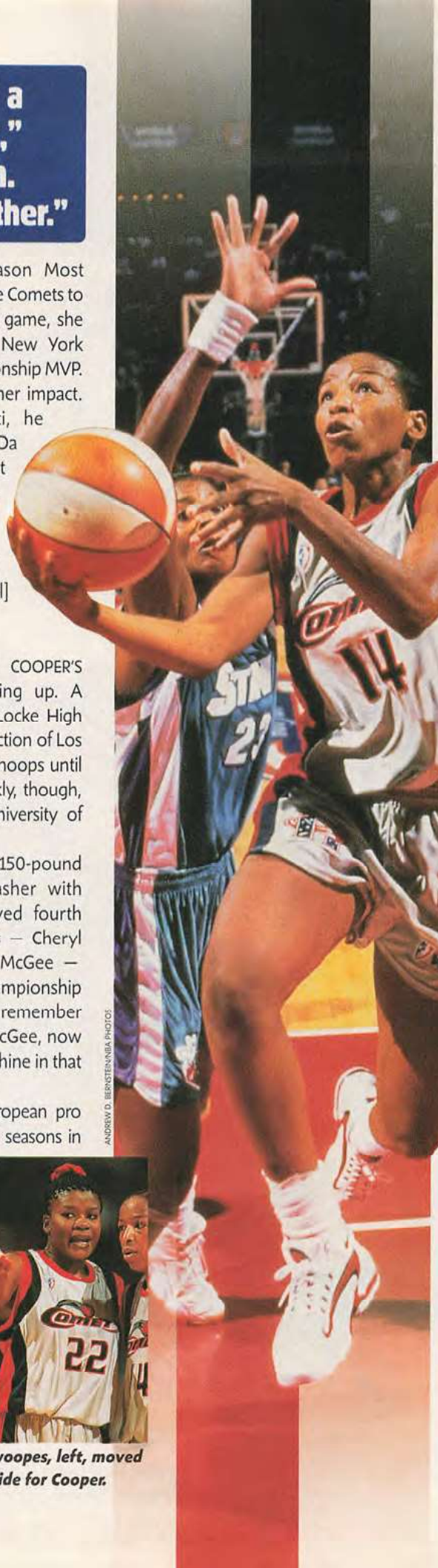
On the court, the 5-foot-10, 150-pound Cooper was an explosive slasher with track-star speed. But she played fourth banana to a trio of All-Americans — Cheryl Miller and twins Pam and Paula McGee — on USC's 1983 and '84 NCAA championship teams. "A lot of people don't remember Cynthia from USC," says Paula McGee, now a sports agent. "It [was] hard to shine in that atmosphere."

Cooper blossomed in the European pro leagues, where she played for 11 seasons in Spain and Italy. She developed a deadly jumper, a solid three-ball, and improved her passing and ballhandling. Competing against admittedly lesser talent, Cooper emerged as a leader, averaging 30.5 points a game during her final eight seasons in Italy.

She performed well enough to make the 1988 and '92 U.S. Olympic teams. Yet once again she was relegated to a supporting role.

BILL BAPTIST/NBA PHOTOS

Swoopes, left, moved aside for Cooper.



ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

COURTESY USC SPORTS INFORMATION

At USC, Cooper played with three All-Americans.

Cooper wasn't even invited to try out for the '96 Olympic team, which featured a new generation of stars, including the three the WNBA would later build around: Lisa Leslie, Rebecca Lobo and Swoopes.

Cooper was happy when the WNBA assigned her to Houston, which was projected to be a good team. Yet she was trapped in a familiar position: playing second fiddle to a highly touted teammate, this time Swoopes.

Starring in Italy, though, had fed Cooper's confidence. "[The Comets] didn't know how my game had changed from the role player [I was] at USC and on the [U.S.] national team to the leader [I became] in Italy," she says.

STILL, COOPER HAD TROUBLE adjusting to WNBA play. She struggled early in the season with the smaller WNBA ball and the physical play. And she was frustrated by the Comets' lack of defined roles; the goal, it seemed, was to hold the fort until Swoopes' return. The team had no clear leader.

What Cooper didn't realize was that she was part of the problem. Though she was leading the team in scoring, she never bought completely into coach Chancellor's deliberate offensive scheme, which revolved around the pick-and-roll. Early in the season, she had let the coach know her feelings about it. "I [hated] the pick-and-roll," Cooper says. "I have a very quick first step, and [I thought] you negate that when you put a pick there because [the defense] can double me."

Despite her protests, Chancellor stuck to his system. Cooper's frustration with the offense was real, however. With its emphasis on precise cuts and perfect timing, she would often run into teammates or rely too strongly on driving to the hoop. Cooper thought she would be more effective creating off the dribble.

As a result, her game lacked focus. Sacramento Monarchs forward Pam McGee, Cooper's former USC teammate who had seen her perform in Italy, knew what Cooper

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Shawn Kemp
Teresa Weatherspoon
John Stockton
Cynthia Cooper
Jerry Stackhouse
Jennifer Gillom
Magic Johnson
Penny Toler

Nikki McCray
Rebecca Lobo
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was capable of. "Early on," McGee says, "I [asked her], 'Wassup?' Because I had told everybody before the season who the MVP was — and nobody believed me."

The Comets stumbled to 7-5 after a 77-52 drubbing by Los Angeles. Following the game, Chancellor and Cooper had the talk that would change the fortunes of both Cooper and the team. "I told him that I could give [him] so much more if he would just let me go, let me play," Cooper says.

But Chancellor had concerns. He stressed that Cooper needed to work harder on the pick-and-roll, give it more time. If she ran the play effectively, he insisted, it would give her more options. She could score off the dribble, pull up for the jumper or dish off to open teammates. Cooper agreed to try. Chancellor then named her the team's go-to player.

"We needed to define a leader, and we did," Cooper says. "At that point, we really started to gel."

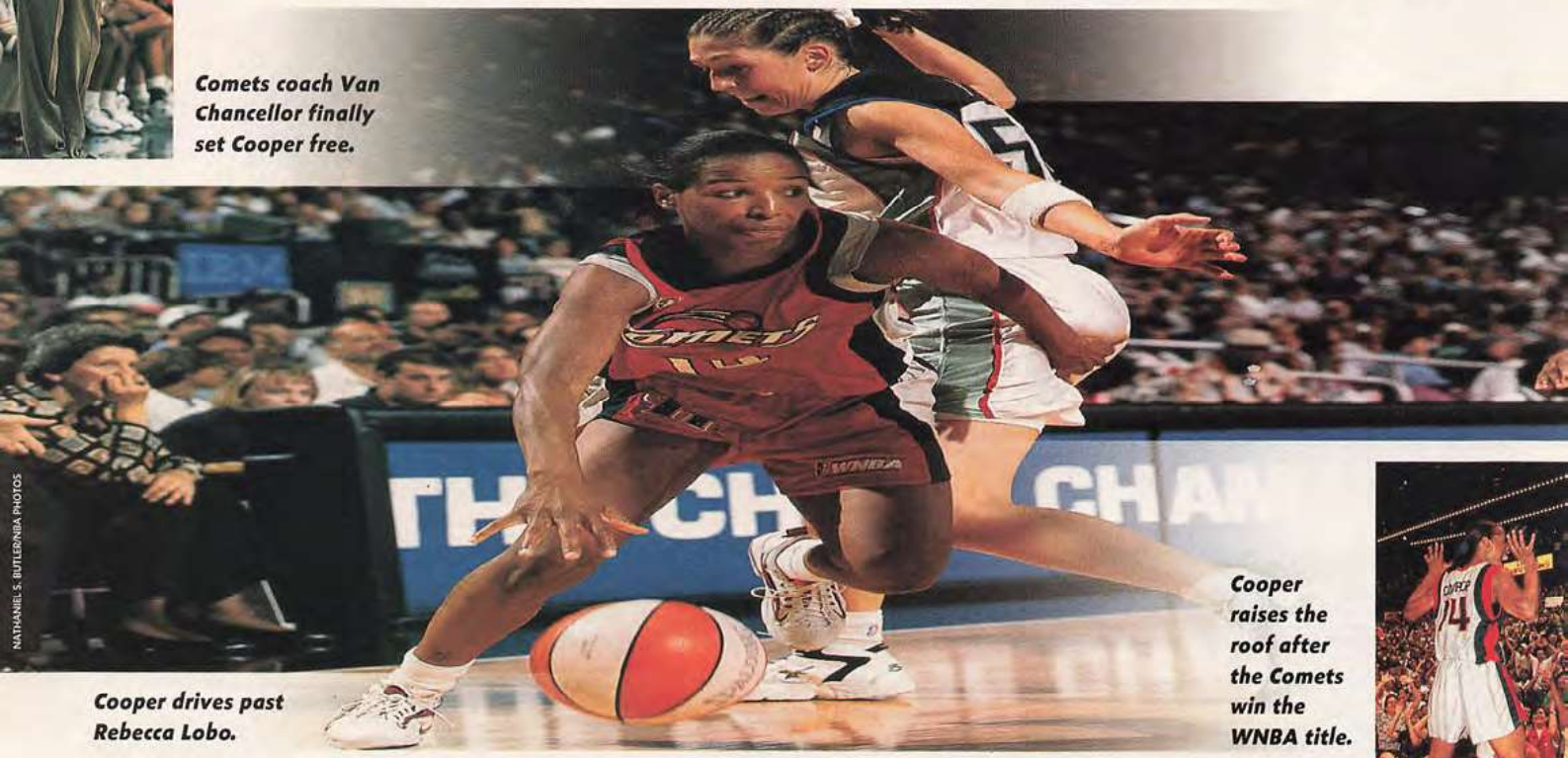
"We needed to define a leader, and we did," Cooper says. "At that point, we really started to gel."

In the next three games, Cooper erupted for 30 points against Sacramento, 32 against Phoenix and 44 in a Sacramento rematch — all league-highs, all wins. "As Cynthia got better, the rest of us [became] better," Chancellor says. "I was trying to mold a team, [not] a superstar. But one fed off the other."

Her play was all the more remarkable considering her responsibilities off-court. Cooper supports and helps care for two nieces and two nephews, one of whom she is adopting. She also looks after her mother, who last March was diagnosed with cancer. "I'd come home from practice, and I would cook, clean and sometimes stay up till 2 in the morning ironing," Cooper says. Playing became her salvation. "When the going got rough at home, I [would mentally] close the door on it and open the door to basketball."

DAVID LIAM KYLE/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Comets coach Van Chancellor finally set Cooper free.



NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

Cooper drives past Rebecca Lobo.

Cooper raises the roof after the Comets win the WNBA title.

BILL BAPTIST/NBA PHOTOS

THE TEAM WAS ON A 5-2 ROLL WHEN Swoopes returned six weeks after giving birth. A big-time scorer, she could have demanded the ball and disrupted the team's chemistry. But Swoopes, out of sync after her layoff, recognized that the Comets were now Cooper's team.

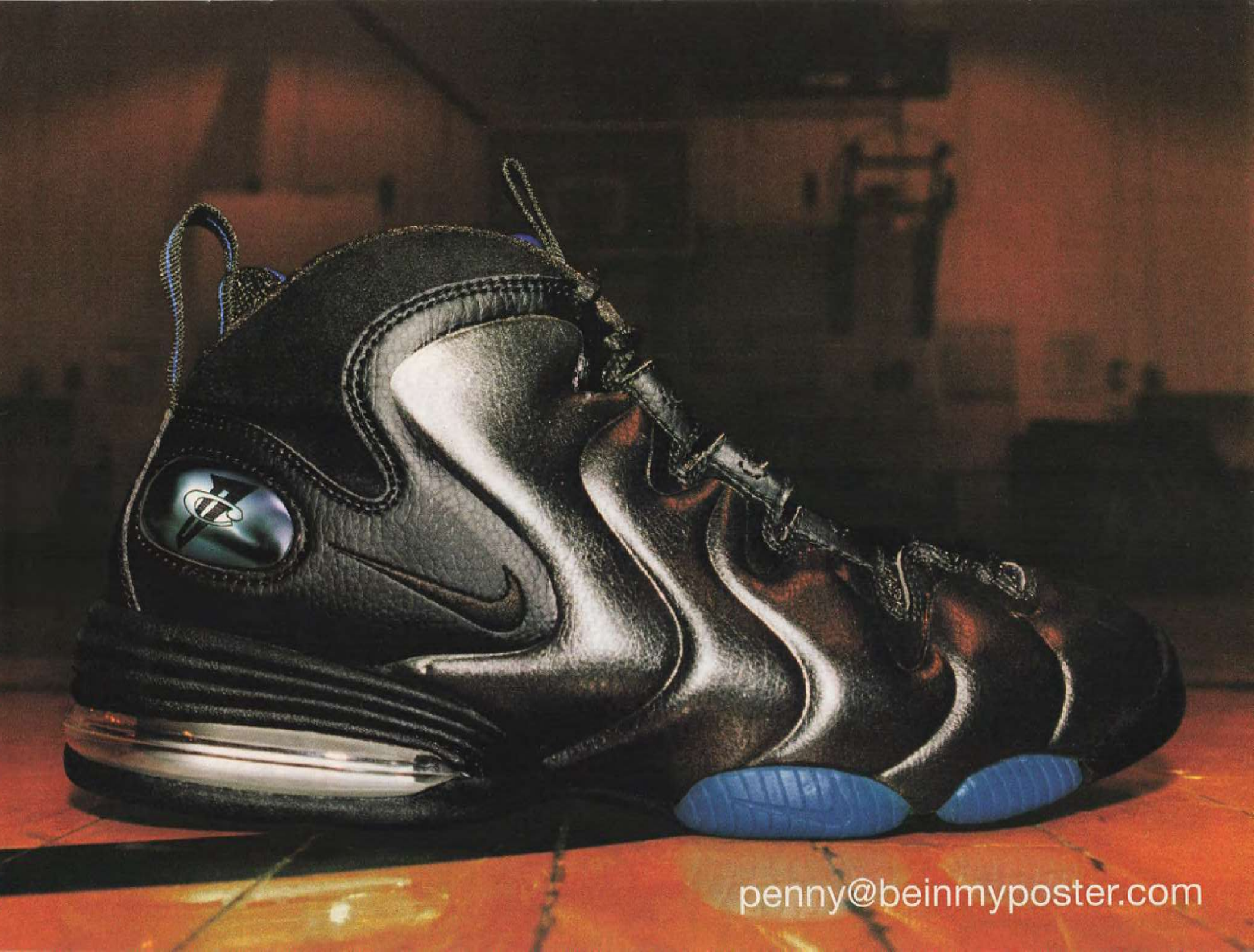
Running the pick-and-roll to perfection, Cooper led the Comets to a 13-5 finish, including the two playoff victories. "Toward the end of the season, we ran the same play [every time] and no one could guard it," Cooper says. "I didn't think that the pick-and-roll could work for me personally, that I could express myself on the court *and* help my teammates, but it really worked for us. [At the end of the season,] I said, 'Thank you, Coach.' "

Cooper finished the season as the league's scoring leader, while ranking in the top six in assists, steals, shooting percentage, three-point shooting percentage and minutes played. She blew past WNBA cover girls Leslie, Lobo and Swoopes to win the league MVP award.

Cooper has the glow of a superstar now. On talk shows with David Letterman and Rosie O'Donnell, she is quick to credit Chancellor and her teammates for the Comets' success. Still, it's clear she relishes the spotlight. Cooper recently signed a new endorsement contract with Nike and has recorded a rap song, "The WNBA is Coming to Your Town." She would love a Cynthia Cooper action figure. "I would welcome it all," she says.

Already the Comets are thinking of how Cooper and Swoopes will divvy up turf next season. "We'll have to run some stuff for Sheryl next year," Chancellor says. "The Bulls run plays for both Jordan and Pippen. I gotta spread the ball around."

Just don't expect Cooper to surrender the responsibility she's earned. "Unless my coach tells me different, I'm the leader of the Houston Comets," she says. Cooper pauses. "I could be the leader, and [Sheryl] could be the marquee player — as long as we're winning."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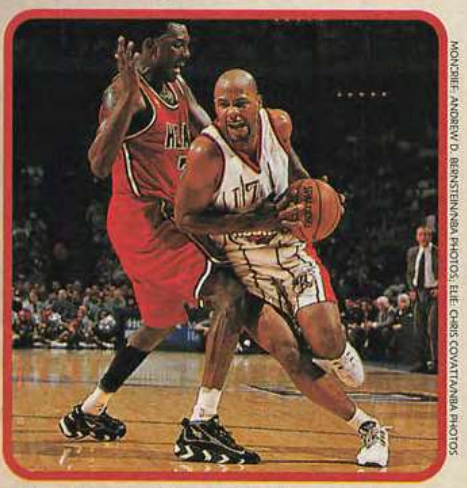
ROOTS

WHERE THE STARS GOT THEIR GAMES

Mario Elie on Sidney Moncrief



MONTRIEF: ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS; ELIE: CHRIS COVATTA/NBA PHOTOS

Like Moncrief, Houston's Elie plays tough.

I LIKED SIDNEY MONCRIEF BECAUSE OF the way he approached the game. He had the will to excel under pressure. On offense, he was a creative passer and he loved to take the big shot. But he was also a great defender — tough, physical. He could switch, rotate and play man-to-man better than anyone I saw growing up. I remember his defensive stance — down real low. He never backed down from anybody.

I really enjoyed how, back in the day, guys were warriors. You look at the young players out there now, and you see guys who are soft defensively. But Moncrief took pride in shutting down the other team's toughest offensive player — and he usually outscored him.

He had a lot of influence on my game. I play tough defense like him. And I'm not afraid to take the tough shot in the closing seconds of a game, either.

SIDNEY MONCRIEF
Guard • 6-foot-3 • 183 lbs.
Milwaukee, 1979-89; Atlanta, '90-91

- Five-time All-Star
- Two-time NBA Defensive Player of the Year (1983, '84)

CAREER STATS

GP	FG%	FT%	PTS	RPG	APG	PPG
767	.502	.831	11931	4.7	3.6	15.6

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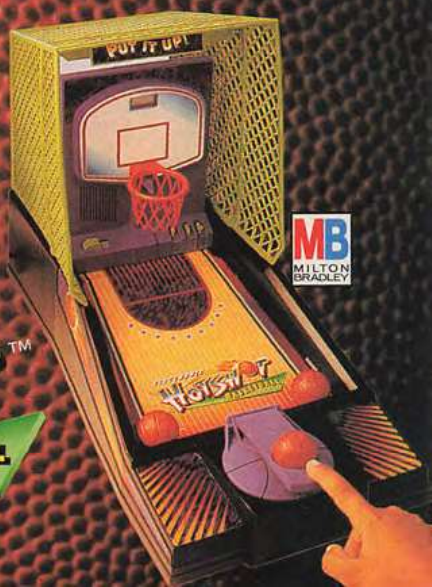

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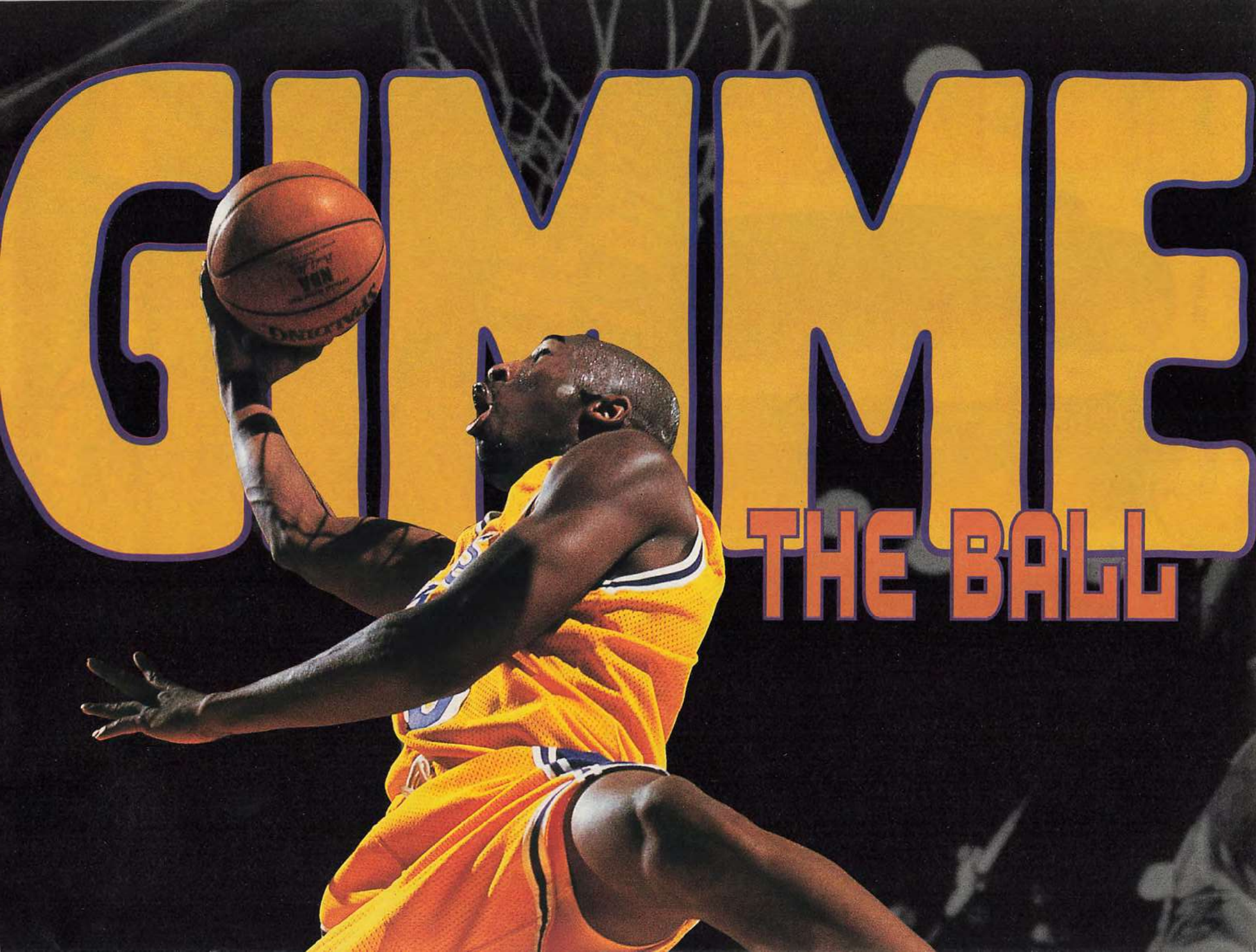

GIMME
THE BALL

KOBE BRYANT WANTS YOUR ATTENTION

KOBE BRYANT WAS AMPED. FOR MUCH OF LAST SEASON, THE 6-FOOT-7 GUARD WAS THE Lakers' sixth or seventh shooting option, mostly off the bench. But now, in the closing seconds of Game 5 of the Western Conference Semifinals against Utah with the score tied at 89, Lakers coach Del Harris had drawn up the game-winning play for him.

Bryant went one-on-one against the Jazz's Bryon Russell, who played inspired defense. We all remember what happened to Bryant: an airball at the buzzer, followed by three more airballs in overtime. Utah won 98-93.

"Bryon Russell wasn't going to let some 18-year-old show him up on national TV," Utah's Karl Malone told USA Today after the game.

That experience could have buried a lesser player. But that seems unlikely to happen with Bryant. "Tonight I just didn't come through," he told the newspaper. "But play the game again, and I want the ball again."

Bryant is driven by challenges. And in this NBA INSIDE STUFF interview, he talks not only of the ones he faced last season, but also of those that lie ahead. →

BY SCOTT HOWARD-COOPER

Bryant shows Utah the soles of his game in the 1997 NBA Playoffs.

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

NBA INSIDE STUFF: Have you gone back and looked at the tape from that last game against Utah?
KOBE BRYANT: Of course.

I.S.: What did you see?
KOBE: I saw a player who had a lot of confidence in what he was doing. Took the shots and missed them. That's about it. Didn't hang my head.

I.S.: Did the misses motivate you?
KOBE: If anything, they gave me *more* confidence. My teammates had the confidence in me to take those last shots with the game on the line, the season on the line. The next time they give me the ball, I'm not going to fold on them. I'm not going to miss.

I.S.: Have you ever regretted going straight from high school to the NBA?
KOBE: No, not at all. The competitiveness — playing against the best basketball players in the world, guarding [Scottie] Pippen, Penny Hardaway, [Michael] Jordan — it's all been fun.

Bryant drives strong — real strong — on the wing.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

I.S.: Jermaine O'Neal [the Portland forward who went directly from high school to the NBA] said at one point last season that if he had it to do over again, he probably would have gone to college first. You obviously have a different point of view.
KOBE: I was lucky. I came to a team that had Shaq, Eddie [Jones] — who I knew from back home in Philadelphia, Byron Scott [no longer with the Lakers] and Jerome [Kersey]. I had a lot of experienced people around who could help me. Jermaine went to a team that was very young. He's going through his ups and downs, but he's going to be fine. We talked and basically said we can't wait until later on down the road. I told him I'm going to be kicking his heinie like I did [at camps when we were both] in high school.

I.S.: Have you talked to Tracy McGrady [the Toronto rookie who also bypassed college for the NBA]?
KOBE: Yeah. We have the same agent, so Tracy came out to L.A. in the summer. He was supposed to stay at a hotel. One night, he was at my house and my mother was cooking dinner. We were just hanging out, having a good time. Next thing I knew, he was at my house for the next two weeks. It was as if we were related.

I.S.: Were you tempted to give him advice?
KOBE: I just let him be, let him go ahead and do the things he needs to do. I can only tell him so much. When you get to a certain point, you're pretty much going to have to find out on your own. The back-to-back games and the traveling, those were the hardest things for me.

ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS

"I KNEW OPPONENTS WERE GOING TO COME AT ME TALKING TRASH."

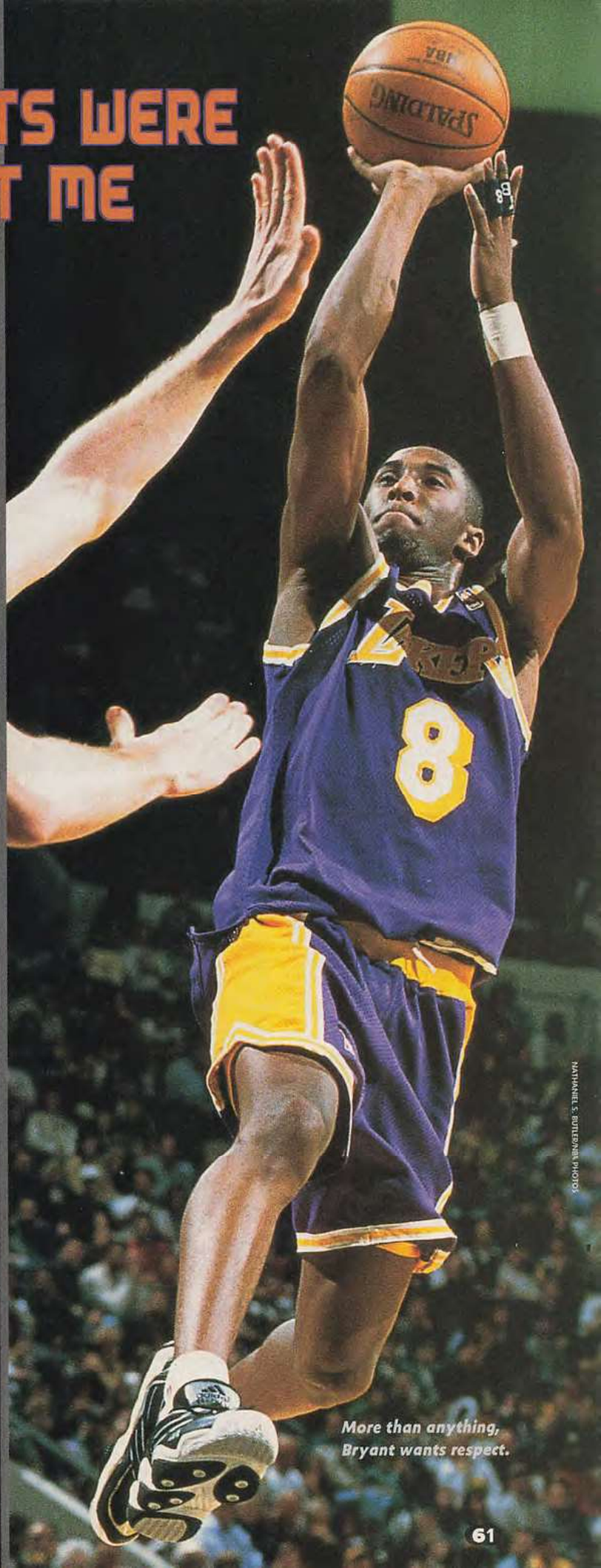
I.S.: With all the road time, did it ever get boring for you?
KOBE: Never. I was having a great time just being in the hotels. It was like, "I'm in the NBA! I'm actually doing this! I'm a professional now!" It was thrilling.

I.S.: Coming into the league straight out of high school, did you feel that opponents tried to put you in your place?
KOBE: Oh, yeah. That's one of the reasons I wanted to come to the NBA — because I knew opponents were going to come at me, talk a little trash. I knew I'd come into the game, and [the opposing] coach would run an isolation play and try to post me up. I wanted that challenge. I wanted to show them that, hey, I'm a basketball player and I'm going to come right back at you.

I.S.: Was it tough the first two months of last season, when you weren't playing much, to try to win respect around the league?
KOBE: As far as my teammates, I saw them every day in practice, so it was important for me to earn their respect. With opponents, it was frustrating because I couldn't come out and show them that I could play this game. That was one of the hardest parts. But sitting on the bench, I learned a lot about basketball — how to deal with certain plays, certain possessions, how to handle certain players. On the bench, you have to kind of dissect the game. You have to try to visualize things that are going to happen before they happen. If I needed to work on a certain move, like guarding a player who's coming off a screen, I'd watch to see how Eddie did it.

I.S.: It must have helped having Eddie on the team, a guy you've known for a while.
KOBE: Yeah, we go back to my 10th grade year. I used to go up to Temple University [where Jones played in college] and run ball with him. We used to go at each other. I remember walking into McGonigle Hall at Temple right after the trade [that sent Bryant's draft rights from Charlotte to Los Angeles] following the [1996 NBA] Draft. I walked by him, and we looked at each other and just started laughing. Just started cracking up.

I.S.: What kinds of things did you learn from veterans such as Kersey and Scott?
KOBE: How to approach the game mentally. They had a tireless work ethic. They were always thinking a step or two ahead of the opposition. They taught me how to do that as soon as I came into the league. →



More than anything, Bryant wants respect.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE PHOTOS

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

With the Lakers' season on the line, coach Del Harris gave Bryant the ball.

"I FIRMLY BELIEVED NO PLAYER COULD HOLD ME ONE-ON-ONE."

I.S.: Are you into the history of the game? Did you appreciate seeing the NBA's 50 all-time greatest players during All-Star Weekend last season?

KOBE: Definitely. When I was growing up, I had every video out there. I had the *Golden Greats* tape with Jerry West [now the Lakers' executive vice president for basketball operations], Bob Pettit, Bob Cousy. So I knew about every single one of those players. And now I play for Jerry, Mr. Clutch. He knows so much about the game. He's taught me a lot of things as far as footwork and defenses and how to set up different shots.

I.S.: You won last season's All-Star Weekend slam dunk contest and scored a record 31 points in the rookie game. Were you out to prove something?

KOBE: I knew what I could do. [Before the game,] I told [Lakers teammate] Sean Rooks, I told [then-Lakers teammate] Travis Knight, "I'm going at them." I told them point-blank. The other rookies were [logging a lot of regular season playing time]. I wanted to come out and show everyone that even though I wasn't playing much, don't forget about me.

I.S.: Where do you think you are now as a player?

KOBE: Last year, I had a tremendous amount of confidence in my skills. I firmly believed there was no player who could hold me one-on-one. Whether that was true or not, I don't really know. But that's how I felt. When I was playing, [though,] I'd say to myself, "Well, maybe this player I'm guarding knows something that I don't know about the game." So over the summer I worked on a lot of things, viewed a lot of videotape and analyzed my game. I feel very confident [now], very strong about my mental game. [So] bring it on.

STEVE DIPAOLA/NBA PHOTOS

Bryant skies to make this sweet pass.

BILL BAPTISTA/NBA PHOTOS

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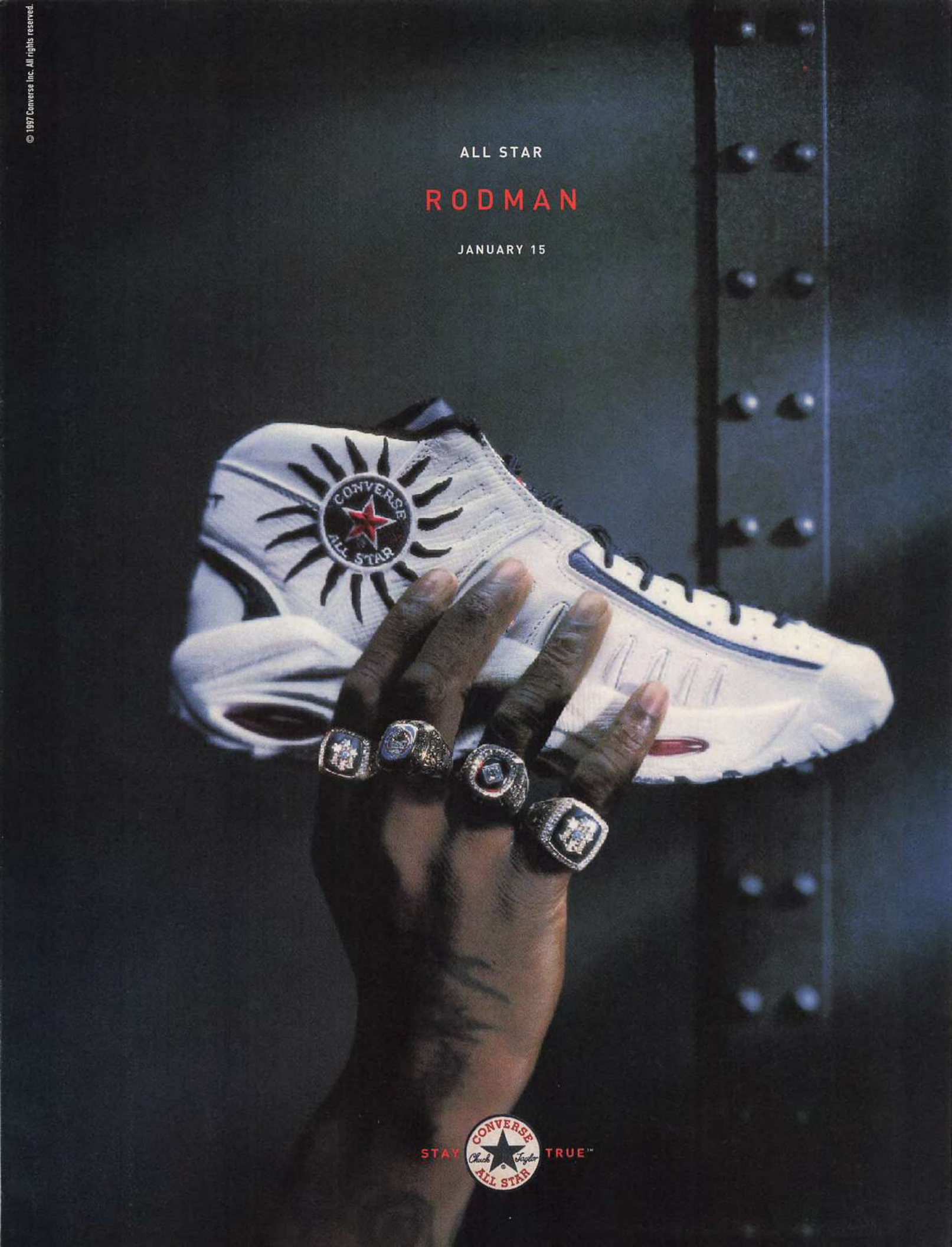

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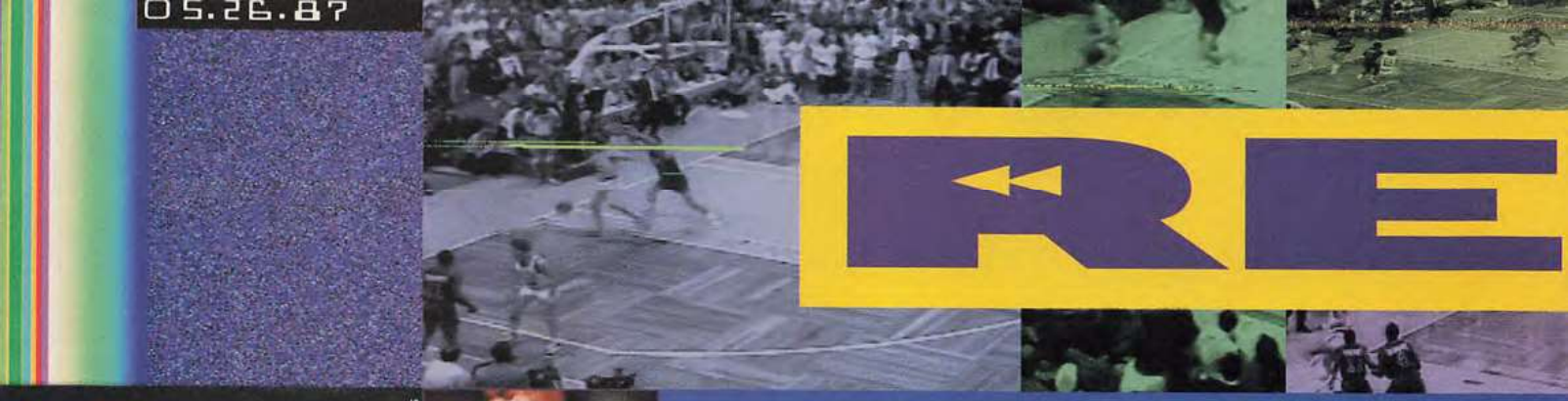


RE

DICK RAPHAEL/NBA PHOTOS

LARRY BIRD, 1987 PLAYOFFS

In one of his most famous plays, Celtics great and current Pacers coach Larry Bird steals more than just a pass from Isiah Thomas and the Pistons. With it, Bird snatches a huge playoff win and a place in NBA history.

2.33.15.24

Pistons' ball, Detroit leading 107-106 with five seconds left in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference Finals. Thomas, bottom left, gets the ball and quickly looks to inbound. "I wanted to throw it in quick and get them to foul us," he says. Pistons coach Chuck Daly is screaming for a timeout, but Thomas doesn't hear him.

2.33.16.02

Thomas tries a high lob pass to teammate Bill Laimbeer, center. Anticipating the play, Bird, right, breaks off of Joe Dumars as Thomas releases the ball. "These things are just instinct," Bird says of his read. "You really don't have time to react to anything."

2.33.17.07

Bird, top, wastes no time. As the clock ticks down, he zips a sharp sidearm pass to Johnson, racing toward the basket. "I knew how much time was left," Bird says, "and I counted it down."

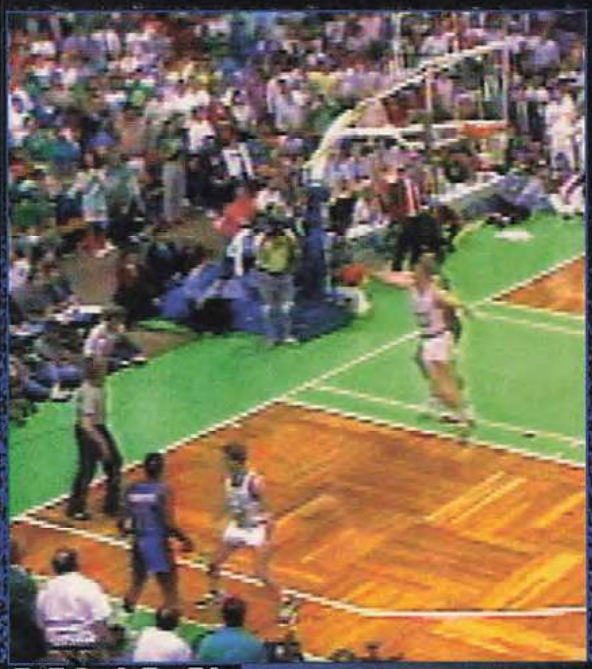
2.33.17.22

As Johnson catches the pass, Dumars, right, races over to stop his drive to the basket. Dumars, a top defender, not only has the inside position, he has the clock on his side.

VIDEO FOOTAGE COURTESY OF NBA ENTERTAINMENT

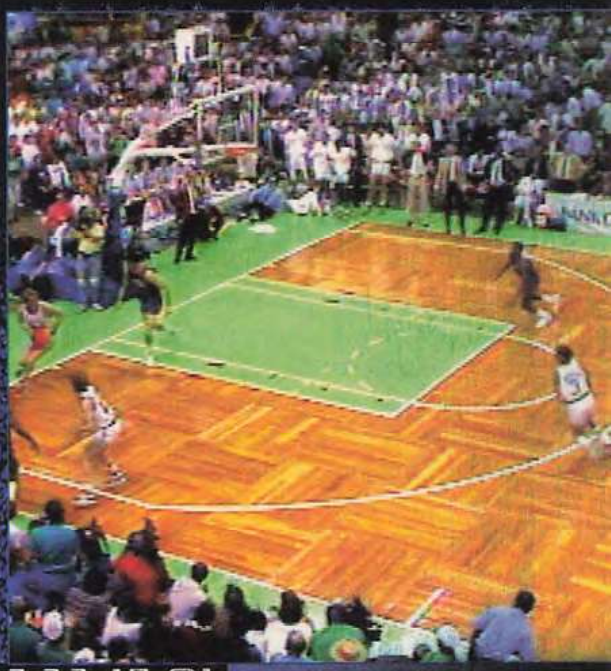
WIND

"Laimbeer sort of just stood there," Bird says. "I didn't know if I could get [the ball], but I knew I could get pretty close." If the pass had been caught, Bird says, "I would have fouled Laimbeer, but then I got my hand in there and I knew I had it stolen."



2.33.16.24

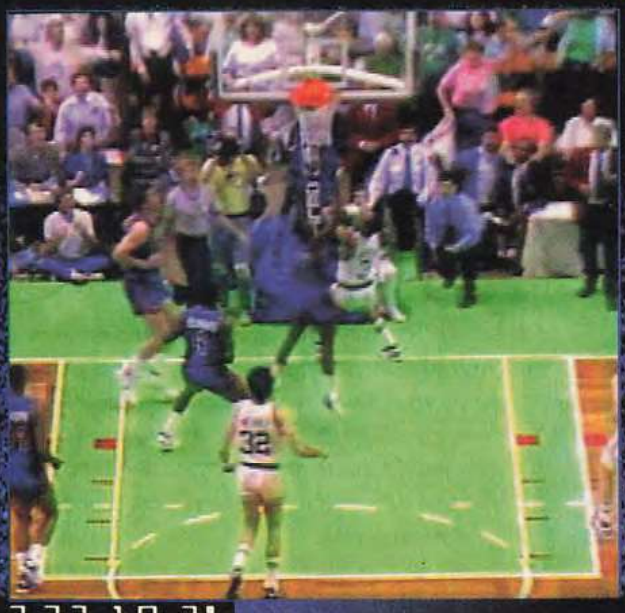
Bird, far left, hustles after the loose ball, battling to control it and stay inbounds. "As I ran over to the corner and got it," Bird says, "I turned and saw D.J. [Dennis Johnson, far right] out of the corner of my eye."



2.33.17.01

2.33.18.00

Johnson streaks in and puts up a nasty reverse layup. "It was difficult," he says. "I was off-balance, and Dumars was swiping at me." Watching, Bird has his doubts. "I never thought it was going in," he says. "I just thought it was going to be a heck of a try."



2.33.18.24

"If I missed that shot, everyone in Boston Garden would have come down on me," Johnson says. But the shot rolls home, putting the Celtics up for good, 108-107. "I was lucky," Bird says of the play. "[The Pistons] were celebrating. Everyone knew it was over." Everyone except Larry Bird.

PRACTICE COURT

Horace Grant explains the outlet pass

THE FAST BREAK IS THE MOST exciting play in basketball, but it won't get off the ground without a good outlet pass.

To me, the outlet is like the foundation of a house. If it's not there or if it's shaky, nothing else gets built. The offense slows down, and scoring becomes more difficult. With it, a team can get some easy baskets by taking advantage of mismatches when teams are slow to get back defensively. A crisp outlet can put a lot of pressure on a defense. Trust me, I've played with Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen and Penny Hardaway, three of the best transition players ever.

Making the outlet pass was one of the first basketball skills I learned growing up. I'm thankful for that. I was never going to be a big scorer or a leaper, but I knew I'd always be valuable if I could rebound and outlet the ball.

There isn't much glamour in making a good, solid outlet pass, but without it, those glamorous plays just don't happen.

— *INTERVIEWED BY TIM POVTAK*

THINK PASS AS YOU GET THE BALL

1. GET POSSESSION. *Make sure you have a solid, two-handed grip and keep the ball up. You can't pass if you can't control the ball.*

2. READ THE PLAY. *Quickly spot where your teammates and your opponents are. You only have a split second to determine whether or not to make an aggressive pass upcourt. Ask yourself if the pass would create an advantage — or possibly lead to a turnover, or pin one of your teammates in a defensive trap.*

3. PICK YOUR RECEIVER. *If possible, try to get the ball upcourt to one of your team's best ball-handlers and creators, usually a guard.*

KNOW WHERE TO THROW IT

1. MAKE EYE CONTACT. *You have to be absolutely sure your teammate knows you're passing to him.*

2. LET HIM GIVE THE TARGET. *If your teammate holds up his hands and stands set, he wants the ball where he is. If he motions in one direction, that's where he's going. Make sure your pass leads him to the spot.*

3. QUICKLY CHECK THE TARGET. *You may see a defender that your teammate doesn't. Before you pass to where your teammate is headed, be sure it's a sound play.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARK HERMAN

NOREN TROTMAN/NBA PHOTOS

MAKE A SHARP PASS UPCOURT

1. USE TWO HANDS TO PASS. *It will give you more power, better control and the flexibility to change your mind at the last instant.*

2. PUT SOME ZIP ON THE BALL. *Grip the ball firmly, and make a crisp chest pass. Follow through by snapping your wrists outward. Lazy passes are easy to intercept. Also, if your teammate has to wait for the ball, the other team will have time to get back on defense.*

3. DON'T THROW THE BALL TOO HIGH OR TOO LOW. *Too low and your pass can be picked off; too high and it will keep your teammate waiting.*

4. FOLLOW THE PLAY. *After the pass, don't stand around admiring the fast break. Get up the court quickly — you may get a chance to finish the play.*

LOCKER ROOM

LOU CAPOZZOLA/NBA PHOTOS

The Knicks' John Starks won the NBA Sixth Man Award in 1997.

JOHN STARKS of the Knicks tells how to succeed as the sixth man

EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE A STARTER, but not everybody can be one. So many people have problems accepting their roles coming off the bench. But look at all the great players, even Hall of Famers, who were sixth men. I look at it as a way I can help my team out.

The difference between starting and being a sixth man is, coming off the bench, you have less time to do more work. My scoring went up last season even though my minutes were down because I had more energy and I was more efficient. Being a starter, you know you're going to play about 38 minutes a game, so you kind of pace yourself a little bit. As sixth man, you have limited time, so you can go 110 to 120 percent in the fewer minutes you're going to be on the court.

Here's what I do to be effective.

FIRST: Cooperate with the starter. Before a game, [starting 2-guard] Allan Houston and I talk about the starter we have to go up against and his backup. In the game, if I'm on the bench and I see some things that Allan can be effective with, I mention them to him, and he'll do the same for me. For us to produce, we have to be on the same page.

SECOND: Know the flow of the game. There's an advantage when you get to see what's going on before you step into the fire. I watch to see what plays the other team is running that night for the guards. Like with Reggie Miller, I know the Pacers like to run a lot of picks for him, so I watch to see what play is called and what's the number of that play, and I prepare myself to get through that pick.

THIRD: Fill in the gaps for the team. When I'm ready to step onto the court, my first question is, how are we playing offensively? If we're playing well there, then how are we doing defensively? Is that player I'm going up against hurting us? Do I have to focus directly on defense to stop that player, get him under control, then focus on the offensive end of the court? I figure out our needs, and then I go all out.

FOURTH: Keep mentally in the game. So many players lose their concentration when they come back to the bench. They start thinking about all the negative things that are going on out there on the court. You've got to focus on the positive things that you did while you were playing, and you just go out there and try to improve on them.

FIFTH: Spark the team in the fourth quarter. Normally, the other team's starting unit is out there. You're coming off the bench, and you're fresh. You have the upper hand at that point, and you can make the difference. I had one big shot last season against Chicago, when I picked up a loose ball off the floor and knocked down the three to seal the game for us.

It's not how much time you're in the game, it's what you do with that time.

— INTERVIEWED BY CHRIS TAUBER

STARKS' TIPS FOR PLAYING OFF THE BENCH

1 **Focus on the job at hand. Know exactly what's going on in the game and what your team needs offensively and defensively before you go in.**

2 **Try to make things happen immediately when you hit the court. Don't hold back in the limited time you're playing out there.**

3 **Step back if you're getting frustrated in a game. You need to sit down, mentally re-evaluate while on the bench, then pick up your play.**

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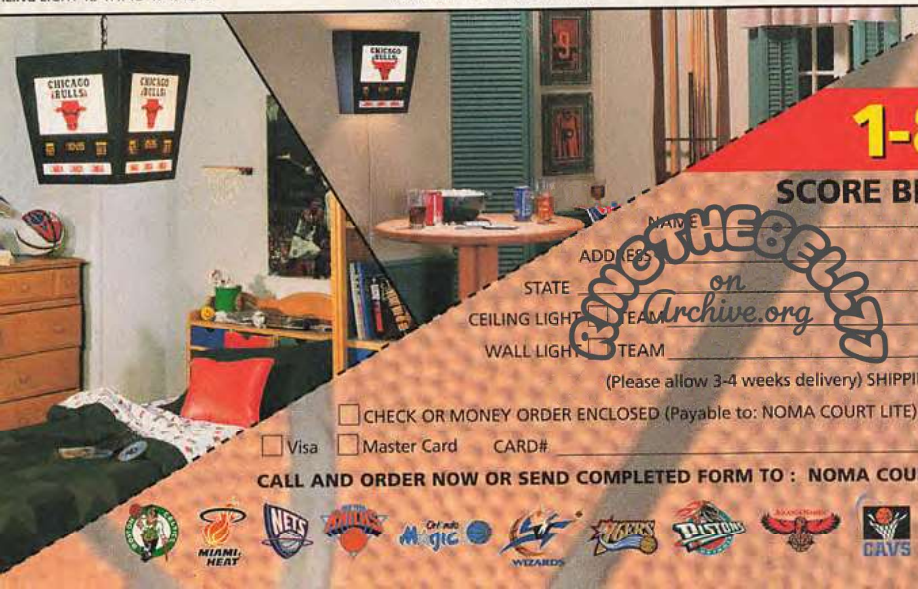

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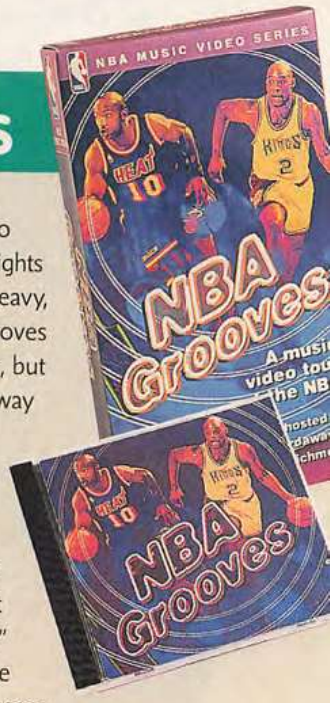
SCOUTING REPORT

A SHOPPERS' GUIDE FOR THE HOOPS FAN WHO WANTS IT ALL

SHOES
FRESH AIR

The ***Jordan Team*** shoe is His Airness' first new model for Nike that falls under his own brand line. It's different from the 13 Air Jordans that came before. No flair, no hype — just basic black or blue-and-white shoes with a simple design and sole pattern. Jordan wants the emphasis to be on performance. In fact, it's an excellent shoe. It's comfortable and durable, with thick cushioning in the heel and flexibility for quick turns and jumps. ($110; Nike: 1-800-238-6453)

VIDEOS AND CDS
COOL GROOVES

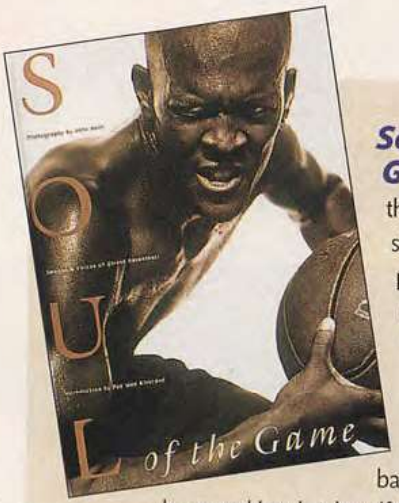


The ***NBA Grooves*** video looks like a *SportsCenter* highlights show — great plays set to a heavy, infectious beat. Mixing NBA moves with music isn't a new concept, but this collection, with Tim Hardaway and Mitch Richmond as the VJs, offers some truly transcendent moments. Tops is Aaliyah's smooth song "Hot Like Fire" blended with slo-mo action of the NBA's 50 Greatest Players. No Doubt's "Just a Girl" serves as the soundtrack for the WNBA's season. There's even a segment where Shaquille O'Neal raps to his own dunks. The upcoming companion CD will include the video's songs, from OMC to Blackstreet, along with bonus tracks — music to get you pumped. (Video, $14.98; NBA Video: 1-888-8GET-NBA)

VIDEO GAMES
TRUE TO LIFE

NBA Live 98 offers digitized versions of stars such as Charles Barkley and Karl Malone with real faces and plenty of fluid moves. But it's the little details that make this the most realistic hoops video game we've seen — such as Scottie Pippen shaking his head after getting knocked down and Tom Gugliotta stretching his legs before a free throw. Add in a three-point shooting contest and play-by-play from TNT's Verne Lundquist, and this game comes closest yet to the real thing. ($49.95; Electronic Arts: 1-800-245-4525)

BOOKS
ART & SOUL



Soul of the Game captures the gritty heart of street ball through photos, poetry and reminiscences. The book describes the inner-city game where some of the greatest basketball talents are born and bred. A handful of the playground superstars are recognizable, such as former NBA stars Nate "Tiny" Archibald and Bernard King. Others, such as Richard "Pee Wee" Kirkland and Earl "The Goat" Manigault, are equally legendary players who never graduated from the streets. ($30; Workman Publishing: 1-800-722-7202)

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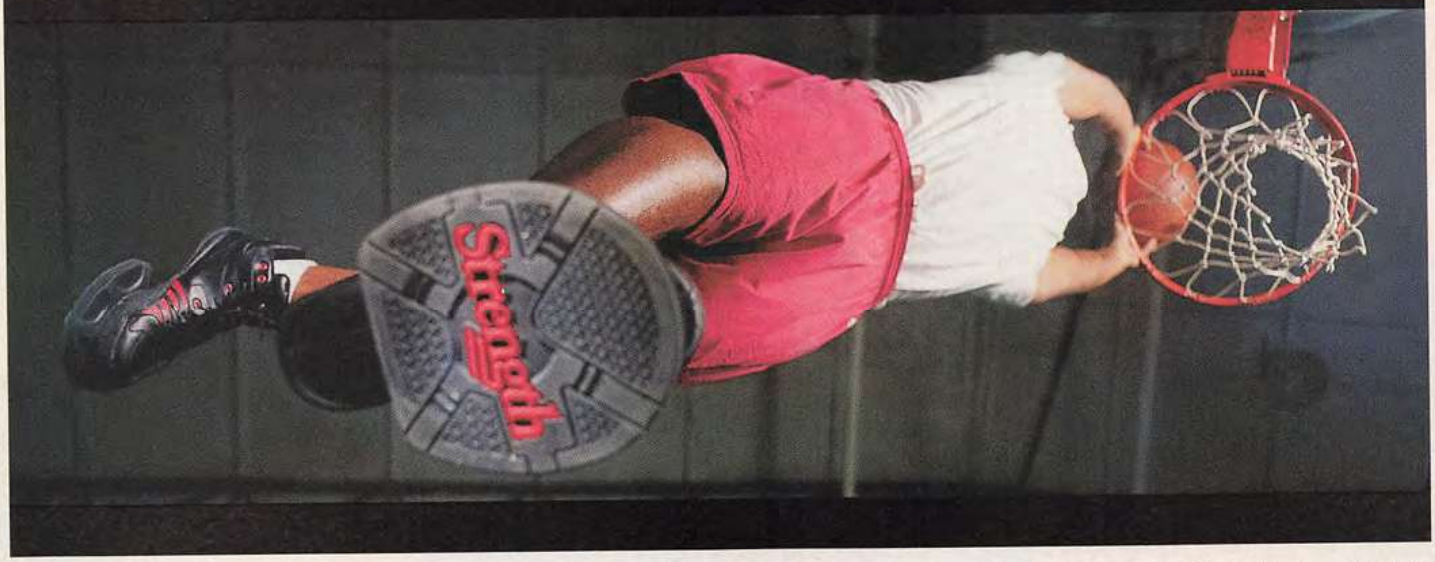

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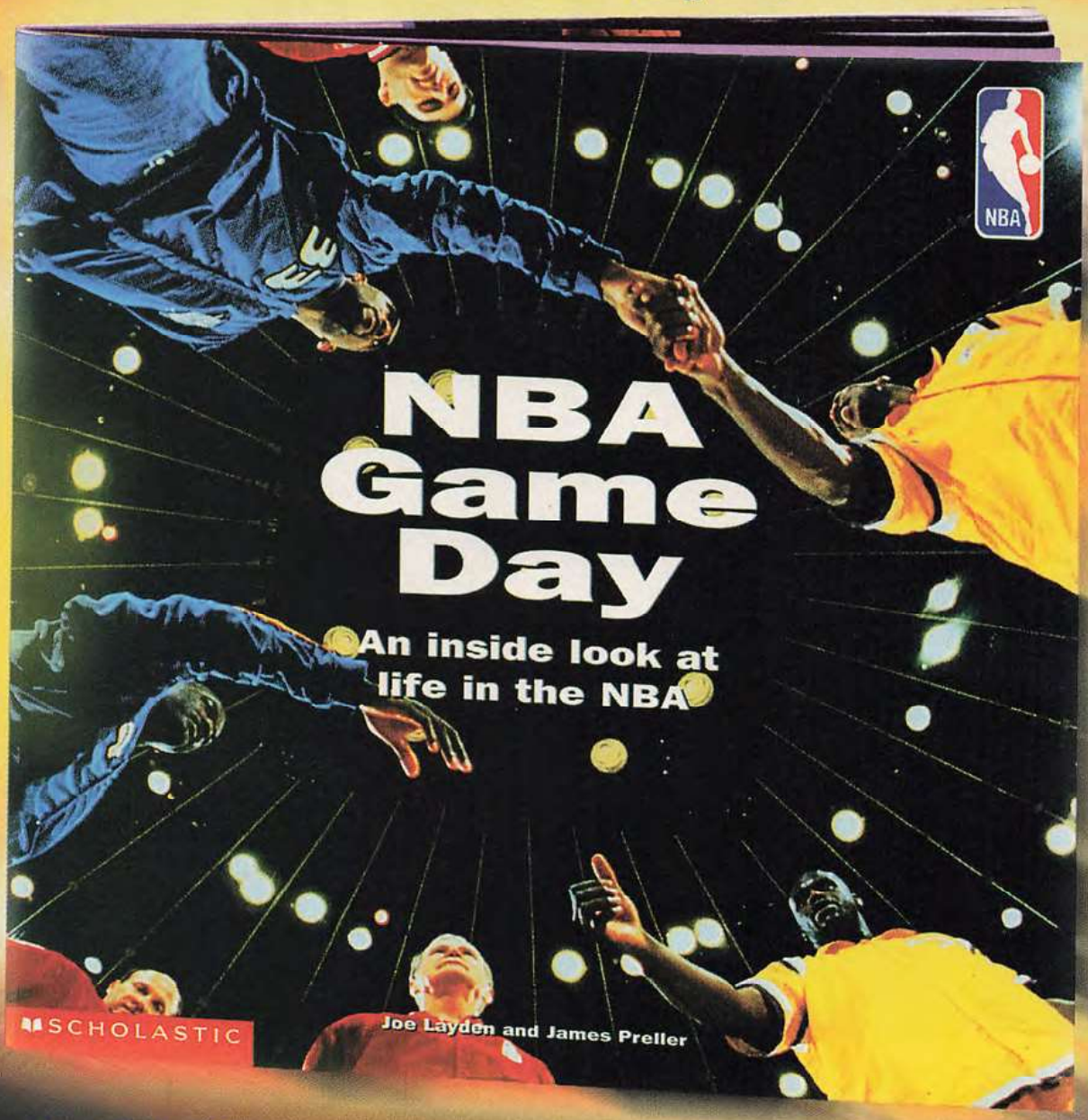

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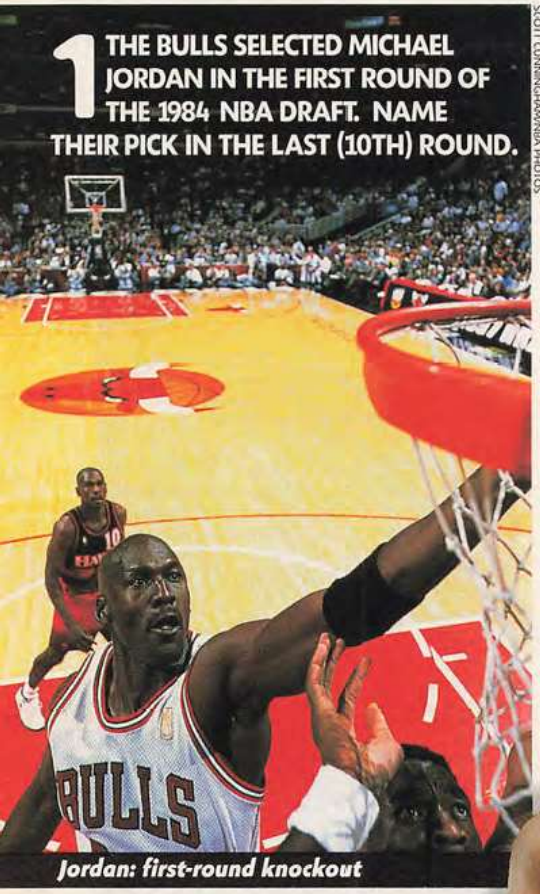
SCHOLASTIC

ULTIMATE TRIVIA

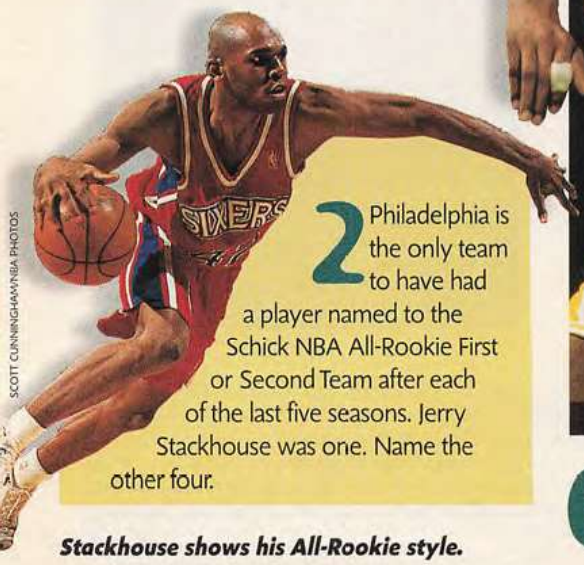
1 THE BULLS SELECTED MICHAEL JORDAN IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE 1984 NBA DRAFT. NAME THEIR PICK IN THE LAST (10TH) ROUND.



SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

Jordan: first-round knockout

2 Philadelphia is the only team to have had a player named to the Schick NBA All-Rookie First or Second Team after each of the last five seasons. Jerry Stackhouse was one. Name the other four.



SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBA PHOTOS

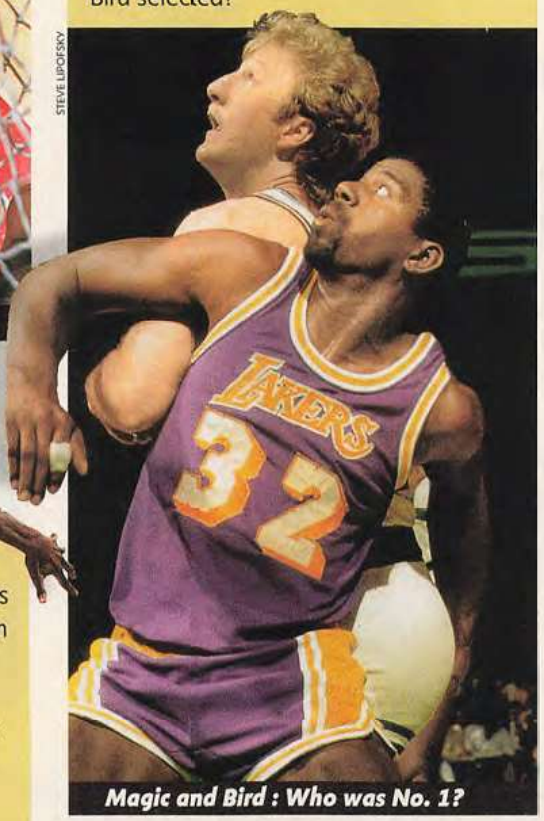
Stackhouse shows his All-Rookie style.

3 Who holds the rookie record for most three-pointers made in a season?

A. Muggsy Bogues C. Matt Maloney
B. Kerry Kittles D. Damon Stoudamire

4 The Los Angeles Lakers' NBA record 33-game winning streak began on Nov. 5, 1971 — the same day that this Hall of Fame Lakers star retired. Who is he?

5 Magic Johnson and Larry Bird were rookies in the 1979-80 season. Johnson was the No. 1 pick in the 1979 NBA Draft. When was Bird selected?



STEVE LIPOFSKY

Magic and Bird : Who was No. 1?

6 Allen Iverson averaged 23.5 points per game last season. Who was the last rookie to have a higher scoring average?

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

Chris Webber: truly a Wizard on the court

7 Washington changed its name from the Bullets to the Wizards this season. By how many names has the franchise been known?

8 Who was the youngest player ever to appear in an NBA game?

A. Kobe Bryant C. Darryl Dawkins
B. Kevin Garnett D. Jermaine O'Neal

9 What player who is now a legendary college coach did the Bulls select in the 1966 expansion draft?

A. John Chaney C. Bob Knight
B. Jerry Tarkanian D. John Thompson

10 Only two players have ever scored 3,000 points in a season. Name them.

ANSWERS: 1. Carl Lewis, the track-and-field star who went on to win nine Olympic gold medals **2.** Allen Iverson, first team, 1997; Stackhouse, first team, 1996; Sharone Wright, second team, 1995; Shawn Bradley, second team, 1994; Clarence Weatherspoon, second team, 1993 **3.** B (The Nets' Kittles made 158 of 419 attempts last season.) **4.** Elgin Baylor **5.** Sixth overall — in the 1978 NBA Draft (Boston selected him after his junior year at Indiana State. Draft rules at the time allowed him the option of staying in school for his senior year before joining the Celtics.) **6.** David Robinson (He averaged 24.3 points per game for the Spurs in 1989-90.) **7.** Six (Washington Wizards, 1997-; Washington Bullets, 1974-97; Capital Bullets, 1973-74; Baltimore Bullets, 1963-73; Chicago Zephyrs, 1962-63; Chicago Packers, 1961-62) **8.** D (The Trail Blazers' O'Neal was 18 years, 1 month and 22 days old.) **9.** D (The Bulls drafted Thompson in the second round out of Providence College.) **10.** Wilt Chamberlain and Michael Jordan (Chamberlain did it three times, scoring 3,033 in 1960-61, 4,029 in 1961-62 and 3,586 in 1962-63. Jordan scored 3,041 in 1986-87.)

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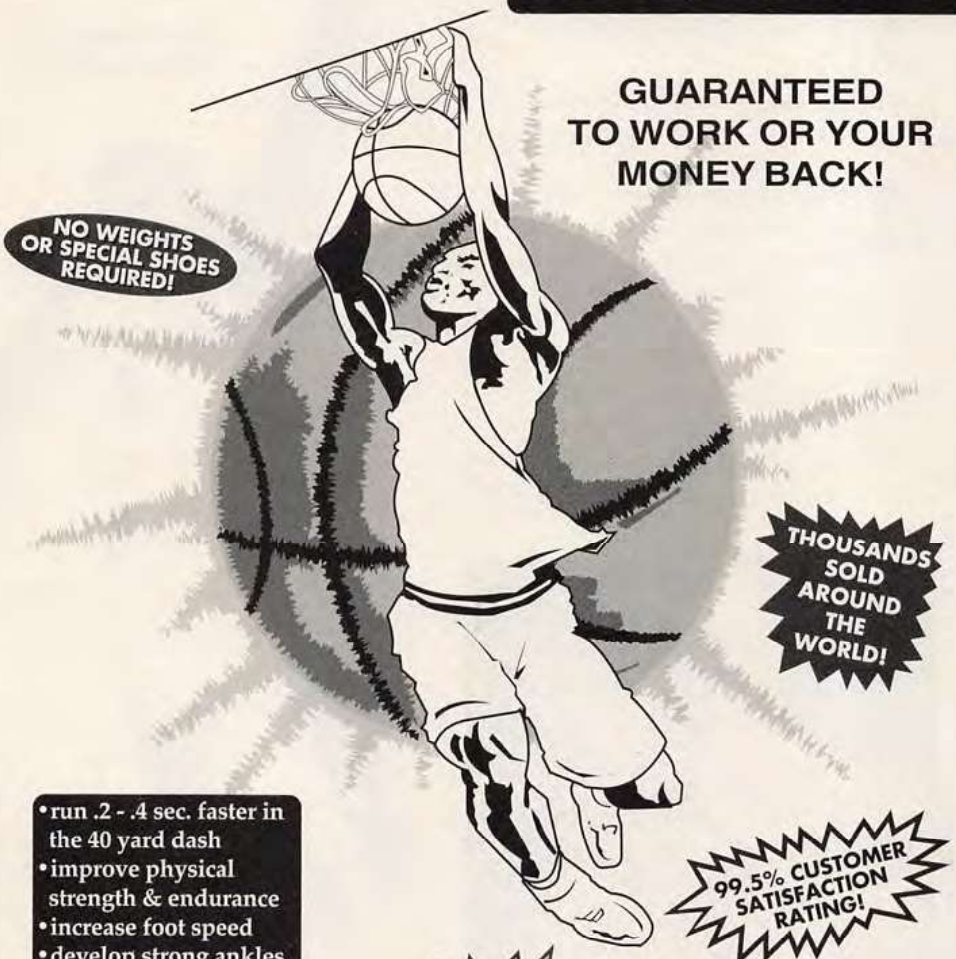

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-S.S., Summerville, SC-

"TMT Sports, I am 16 years old. I have used 5 different programs trying to offer me some ups. They did not have the true exercises that *Air Alert II* has. Your program tops them all. In just 8 weeks, I gained 9 inches on my vertical and can now dunk."
-J. Heinrich, San Diego, CA-

"I have just completed my 12th week of your *Air Alert II* program, and I am amazed. Not only [did] my vertical jump increase by 9.5 inches, but my kicking techniques (I am a martial artist), are much more explosive and powerful and my legs look better than ever."
-S. Igor, Serbia, Yugoslavia-

"A friend of mine purchased your program. Before *Air Alert II*, he was the worst player I've ever seen, today he is the best. He is only 5'7" and now he can make a 360 slam dunk. Please rush me your program. I wanna be able to fly."
-J.P. Cavalcanti, Porto Alegre, Brazil-

"I think the *Air Alert II* program is the most effective program out there. Some programs just build up your calves, but yours builds up every muscle in your leg. Your program has put 11 inches on my vertical. I was gaining about 1 inch a week. Some weeks I even gained 2 inches. I highly recommend this program for anyone who wants to improve their leg power as well as their all around game in a short amount of time. Thanks TMT Sports!"
-E. Faulk, Jr., Mattapan, MA-

"I ordered [*Air Alert II*] expecting to gain around 9", and was blown away when I ended up with a total gain of 15". I'm also faster and have a much better first step. I would recommend your program to anyone who wants to improve."
-A.M., Cascade, MD-

"Thanks so much! I have become such a great player. I became the best rebounder around after using your program. I am only 14 and can dunk. I developed great work habits. I trained with [*Air Alert II*] and gained 15 inches, quickness and speed. This is the best vertical jump program around. Thanks.
-M.D., Newark, DE-

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GAME NOTES BY WILLOW BAY

MITCHELL LAYTON/NBA PHOTOS

Webber races to the finish line at the Kmart Kids Race Against Drugs event in D.C.

SPEED RACER

WE'VE ALL SEEN CHRIS WEBBER DRIVE TO THE HOOP. But how about driving a lawn tractor on a Capitol Hill racetrack? The Wizards forward showed off his "motor skills" at the 1997 Kmart Kids Race Against Drugs in Washington, D.C., last September. The event, in which 85 Congressmen raced tractors through an obstacle course, helped raise $50,000 for drug prevention programs. Webber met with dozens of kids, then took a test drive around the course. Hey, Chris, better stick to mowing down defenders on the court.

CHIEF HAWK

HE'S NO KEVIN COSTNER. BUT Atlanta Hawks center Dikembe Mutombo showed he could dance with wolves while participating in a powwow on the Crow Indian Reservation in Lodge Grass, Mont., last September. During his two-day visit, Mutombo and former Nuggets All-Star Alex English conducted basketball workshops at Lodge Grass High School, toured the Little Big Horn Battlefield and sat in a tribal "sweat lodge," a tepee-styled sauna used for purification rituals. No doubt he tried to conjure up something to rid the league of the hex cast over it by the unbeata-Bulls.

PATRICK HAGGERTY/NBA PHOTOS

Mutombo: home on the range

SCHOOL DAZE

FINALLY, A SUBSTITUTE TEACHER WHO CAN PLAY some D. That's what students at Seattle's Highland Park Elementary School probably thought when Sonics guard Nate McMillan played teacher for a day as part of the team's Read to Succeed program. McMillan urged the students to speak up in class, get good grades and not be shy about asking those really "dumb" questions. "When I was in school, I was afraid of pronouncing a word wrong or not being able to read fast," McMillan said. "So I didn't raise my hand a lot." By the way, Nate says his best subjects were social studies and history.

JEFF REINKING/NBA PHOTOS

McMillan: teacher for a day

ROOKIE CLASS

PLEASE LEAVE YOUR NAPKIN ON YOUR LAP. Oh, and it's pinkie *in* when holding that teacup.

Table etiquette was only part of what 57 rookies learned at last fall's Rookie Transition Program, a four-day seminar sponsored by the NBA and National Basketball Players Association.

The rooks also received advice from veterans and retired players on the dangers of excessive drinking and gambling and on the responsibilities of professional athletes to give back to their communities. "I thought the real-life experiences that people talked about, like the HIV-AIDS seminar, really hit home," said Vancouver's Antonio Daniels.

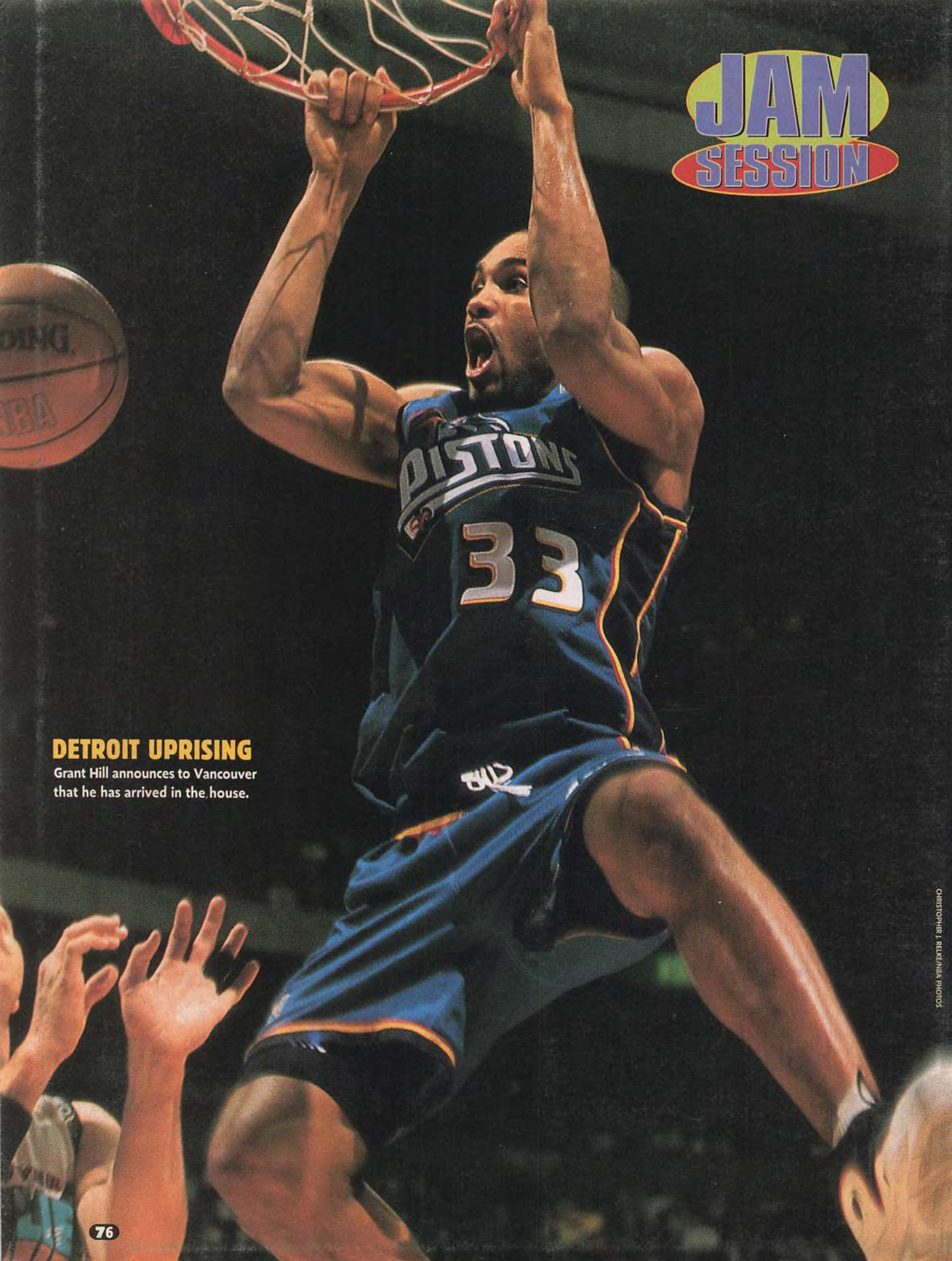
Golden State's Adonal Foyle called the experience "invaluable. The older players really want to protect the younger ones in the league."

MASTER'S SEMINAR

"HOW TO DEMORALIZE OPPONENTS WITH LAST-SECOND SHOTS," 10 A.M. "PERFECTING Your MVP Acceptance Speech," 11 a.m. OK, so those weren't really classes offered at Michael Jordan's four-day adult basketball clinic in Las Vegas last summer. But the 55 hoops wannabes — Michael called them "frustrated athletes living their dreams through us" — did get expert pointers from college and NBA coaches, as well as from the master himself. The campers scrimmaged, received shooting instructions and even tried to beat coach Jordan in a free throw contest, with the losers having to do calisthenics. The result? Push-ups for all.

NBA Inside Stuff

Willow Bay co-hosts* NBA Inside Stuff, *Saturdays on NBC. Check local listings for time.



DETROIT UPRISING

Grant Hill announces to Vancouver that he has arrived in the house.

CHRISTOPHER J. RELKE/NBA PHOTOS

NBA INSIDE STUFF

Poster number 8

TO REMOVE THE POSTER of **Kevin Garnett** and **Kobe Bryant**, tear off this flap.

FOR FAST FACTS on both players, see the other side of this flap.

NBA INSIDE STUFF Poster number 8

TO REMOVE THE POSTER of Kevin Garnett and Kobe Bryant, tear off this flap.

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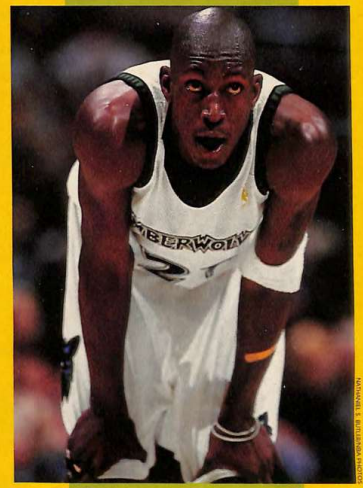
JAM QUAKE

Kobe Bryant

Kevin Garnett
"Da Kid"



FORWARD ▪ MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES

HEIGHT: 6-foot-11 **WEIGHT:** 220 lbs.
BIRTHDATE: May 19, 1976
BIRTHPLACE: Mauldin, S.C.
HOW ACQUIRED: Selected out of high school by the Timberwolves with the fifth pick overall in the 1995 NBA Draft.
COLLEGE: None

CAREER HIGHS: 33 PTS ▪ 19 RB ▪ 8 AST ▪ 8 BLK

NBA REGULAR SEASON RECORDS

	GP	FG%	FT%	PTS	AST	RB	RPG	APG	PPG
1995-96 Minnesota	80	.491	.705	835	145	501	6.3	1.8	10.4
1996-97 Minnesota	77	.499	.754	1309	236	618	8.0	3.1	17.0
Totals	157	.496	.736	2144	381	1119	7.1	2.4	13.7

HONORS: NBA All-Star (1997). Schick NBA All-Rookie Second Team (1996). USA Today National High School Player of the Year (1995).

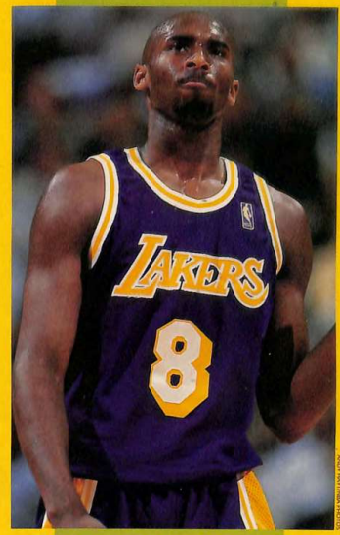
INSIDE STUFF: Though Garnett portrayed Wilt Chamberlain in the movie *Rebound*, his sports heroes are Magic Johnson and former NFL running back Tony Dorsett.

NBA insideSTUFF

POSTER NO. 8 JANUARY 1998

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS

Kobe Bryant



ANDY HAYT/NBA PHOTOS

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HEIGHT: 6-foot-7 **WEIGHT:** 210 lbs.
BIRTHDATE: Aug. 23, 1978
BIRTHPLACE: Philadelphia, Pa.
HOW ACQUIRED: Selected out of high school by the Hornets with the 13th pick overall in the 1996 NBA Draft, then traded to the Lakers (for Vlade Divac).
COLLEGE: None

CAREER HIGHS: 24 PTS • 8 RB • 5 AST • 3 STL

NBA REGULAR SEASON RECORD

	G	FG%	FT%	PTS	AST	RB	RPG	APG	PPG
1996-97 L.A. Lakers	71	.417	.819	539	91	132	1.9	1.3	7.6

HONORS: Schick NBA All-Rookie Second Team (1997). Nestlé Crunch Slam Dunk winner (1997). USA Today and Parade magazine National High School Player of the Year (1996).

INSIDE STUFF: His dad, former NBA player Joe "Jelly Bean" Bryant, named Kobe after a Japanese steak known for its tenderness, quality and expense.

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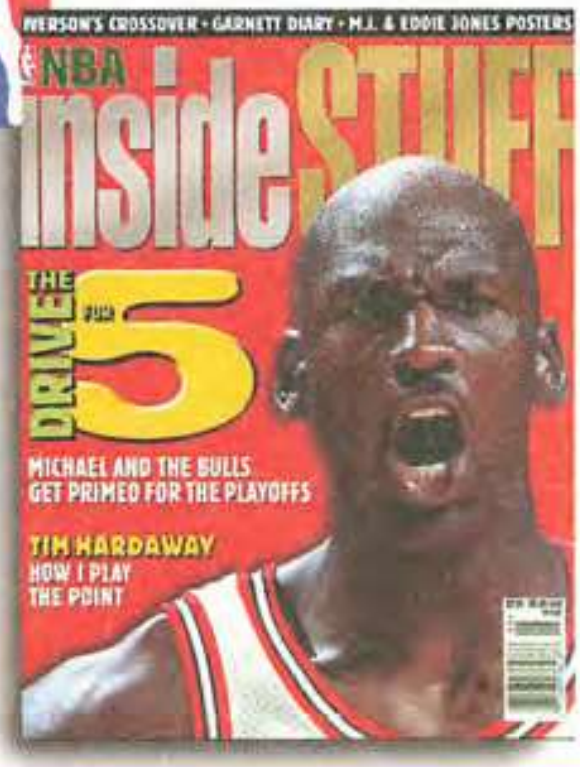
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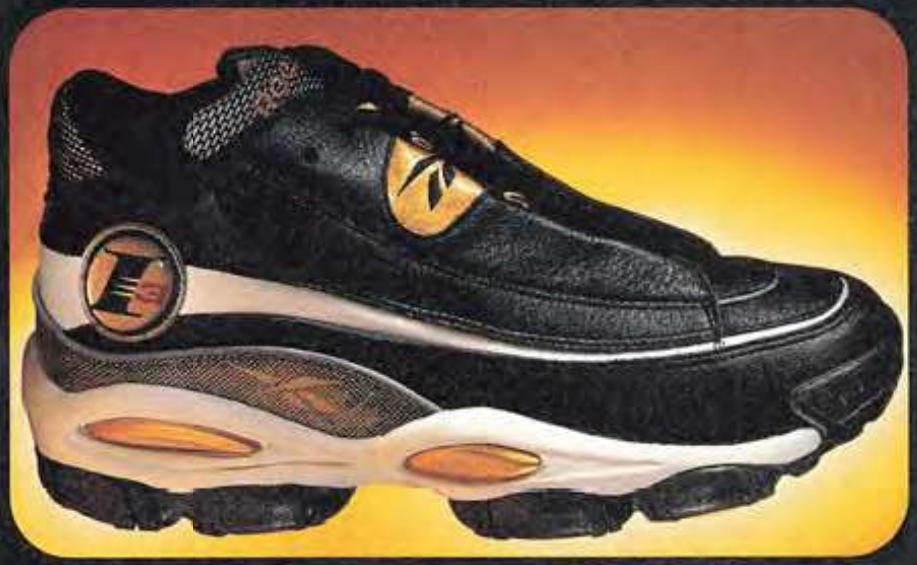

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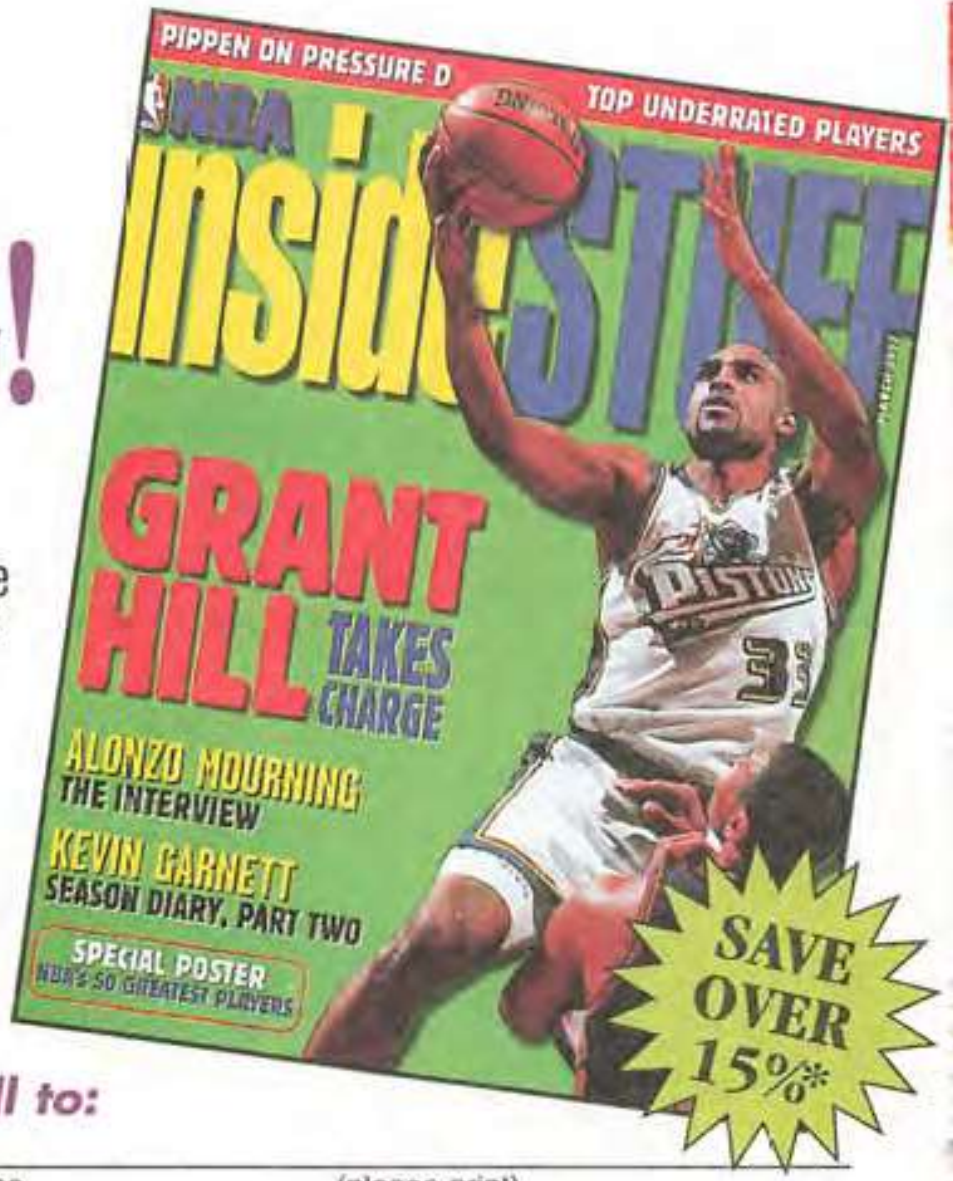

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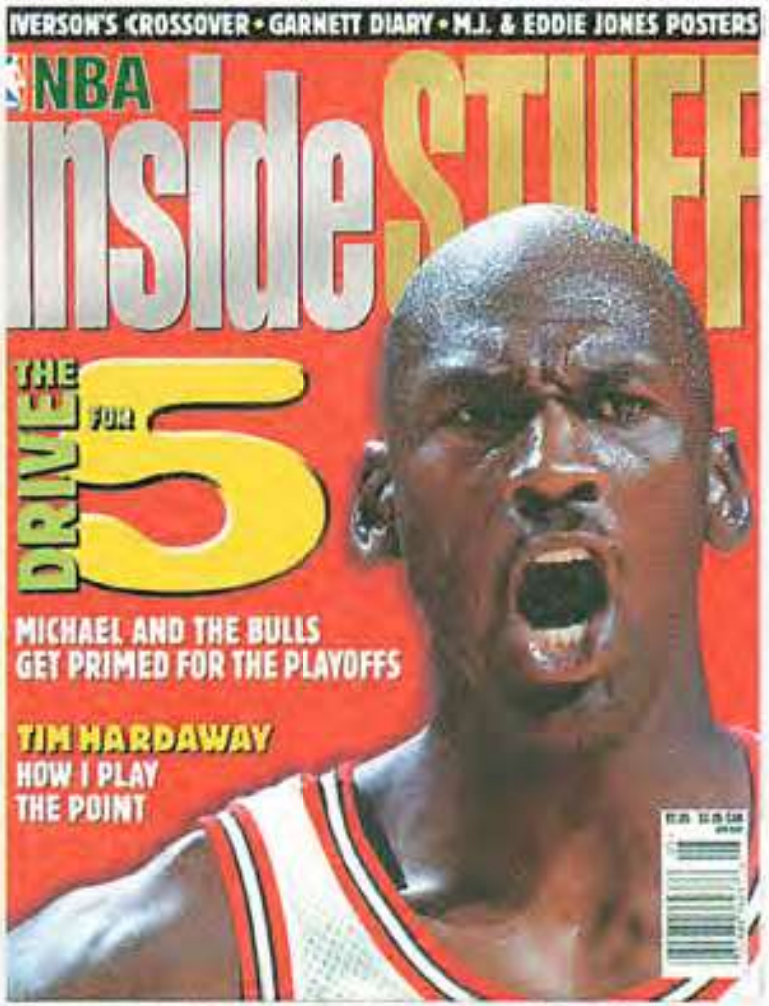
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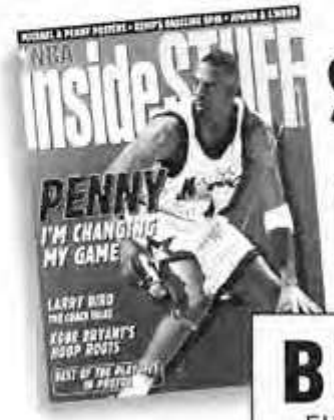

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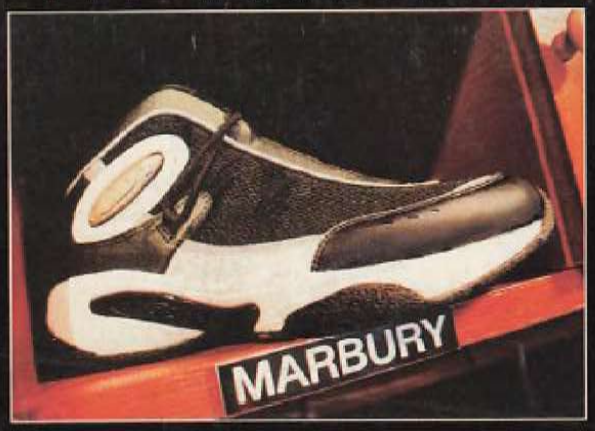

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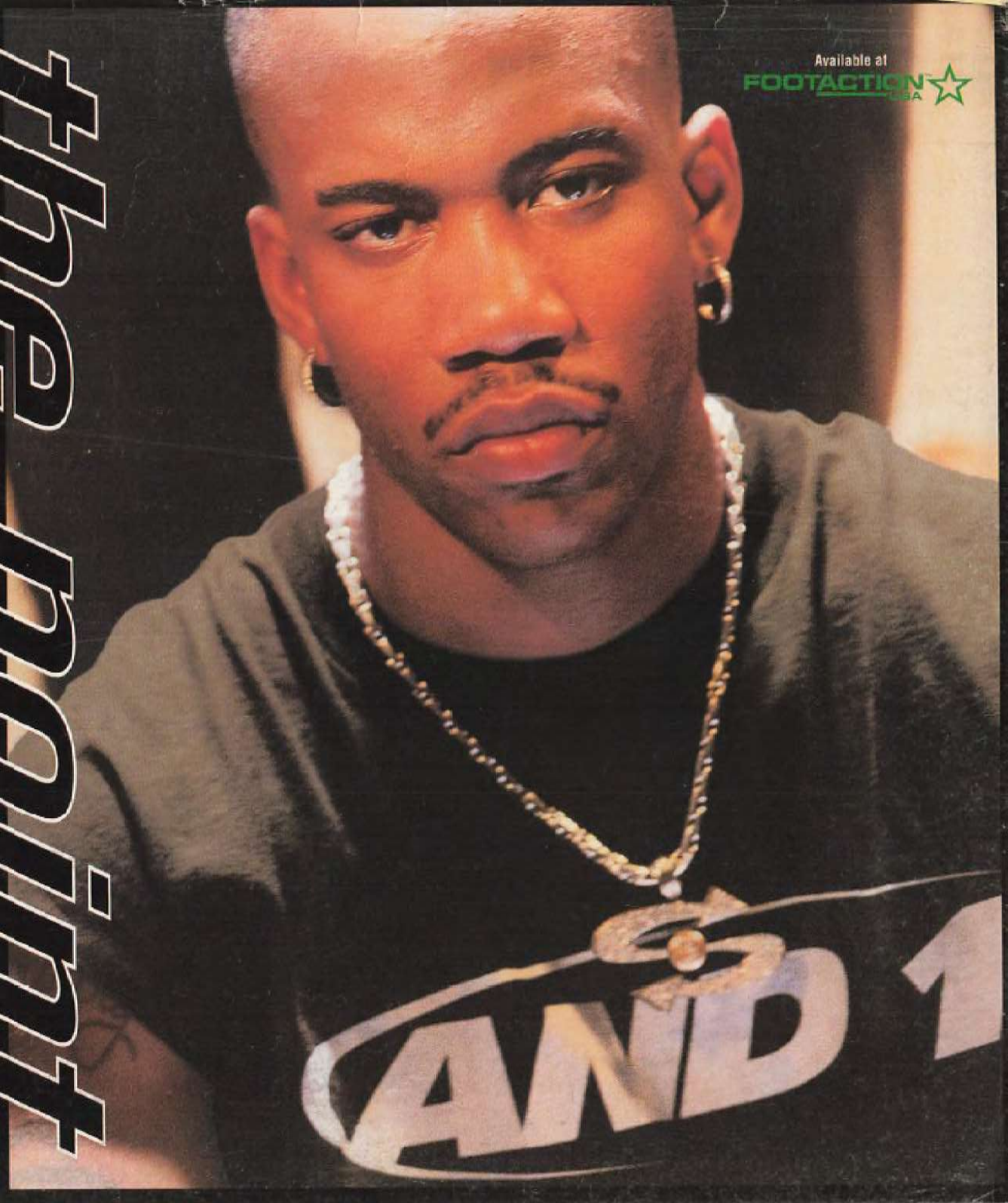

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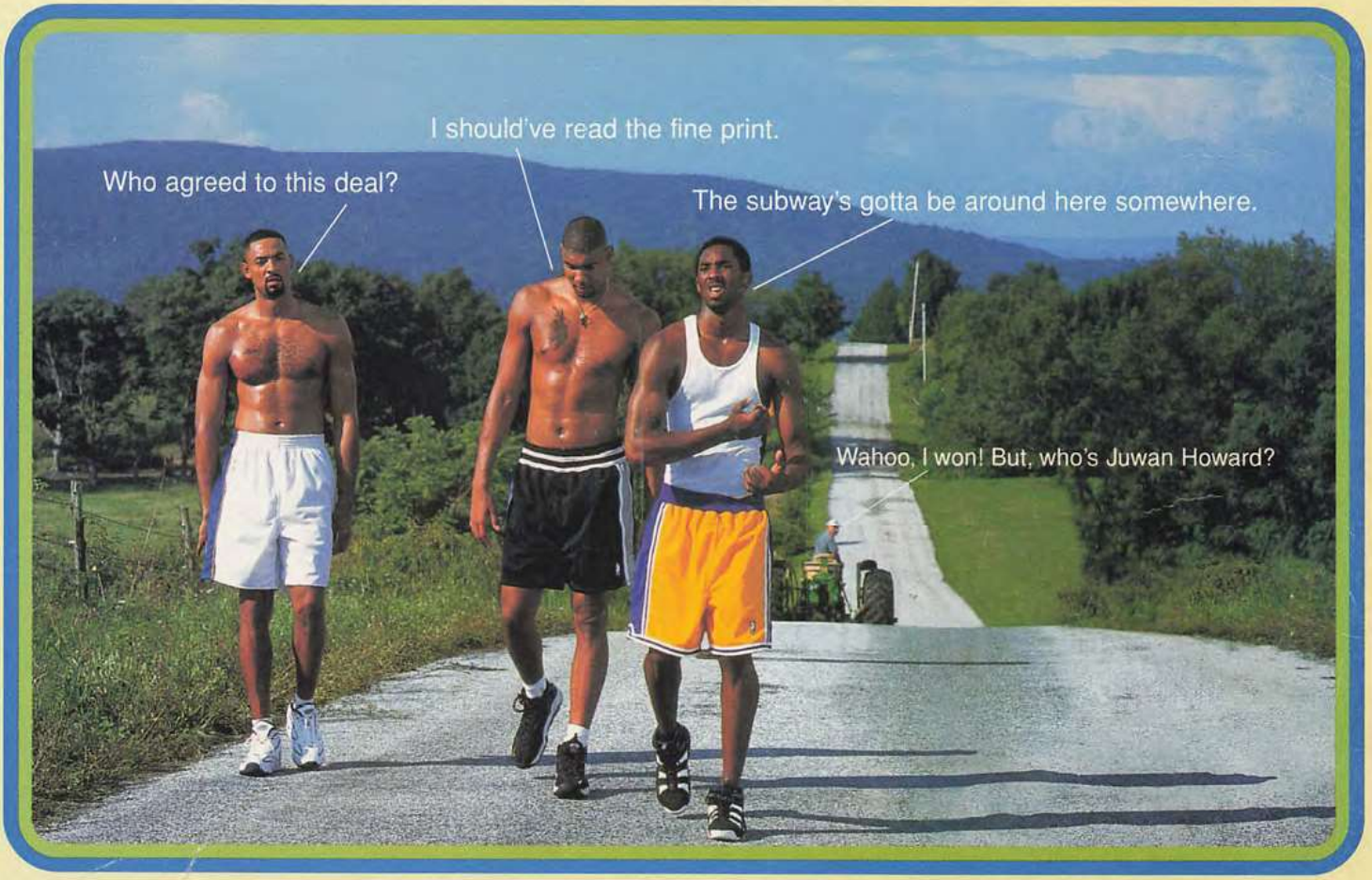
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